KISHORE SATSANG

PRAVIN

A Textbook of the Satsang Examinations Series: 12

Kishore Satsang Pravin

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Blessings

The youth movement established and nourished by Brahmaswarup Yogiji Maharaj has been expanding at a very rapid pace. With a view to satisfying the aspirations and the thirst for knowledge of the youth joining the organization, and also to enable them to understand and imbibe the principles of Akshar and Purushottam expounded by Bhagwan Swaminarayan, the publications division, Swaminarayan Aksharpith, organized under the auspices of Bochasanwasi Shri Akshar Purushottam Swaminarayan Sanstha, presents a series of books.

Through these books, it is intended to impart systematic, sustained and pure knowledge in simple language on a scholastic basis to children and youth of the Swaminarayan Sampradaya. It is hoped that this Sanstha, established by Brahmaswarup Shastriji Maharaj for implementing and propagating the Vedic ideals propounded by Bhagwan Swaminarayan, will, through this activity, spread the ideals and noble traditions of the Sampradaya and through it, the culture and heritage of the Hindu religion.

It is the aim of this project to preach and spread the divine message of Bhagwan Swaminarayan to all corners of the world. We hope that all religious-minded truth-seekers of the Sampradaya and those outside of it, will welcome this activity and extend their fullest co-operation.

In order to encourage children and youths, annual examinations are held based on the curriculum as worked out in these books. Certificates are also awarded to successful candidates. We bless Pujya Ishwarcharan Swami, Prof. Rameshbhai Dave, Kishorebhai Dave, and all others who have cooperated in the preparation of these books.

Shastri Narayanswarupdasji
(Pramukh Swami Maharaj)
Jai Swaminarayan

Vasant Panchmi
V.S. 2028 (1972 ce)
Atladra

Publisher's Note

The Swaminarayan Sampradaya has its unique tradition of worship rituals, festivals and observances. They are based on the Vedic Sanatan (Hindu) Dharma and have been revealed by Bhagwan Swaminarayan through his teachings and their practical application in his life. It is by following these conventions and commands that the lives of all *satsangis* can be properly moulded. By living according to these traditions devotees can protect themselves from bad company, become ideal *satsangis* and attain ultimate redemption in life.

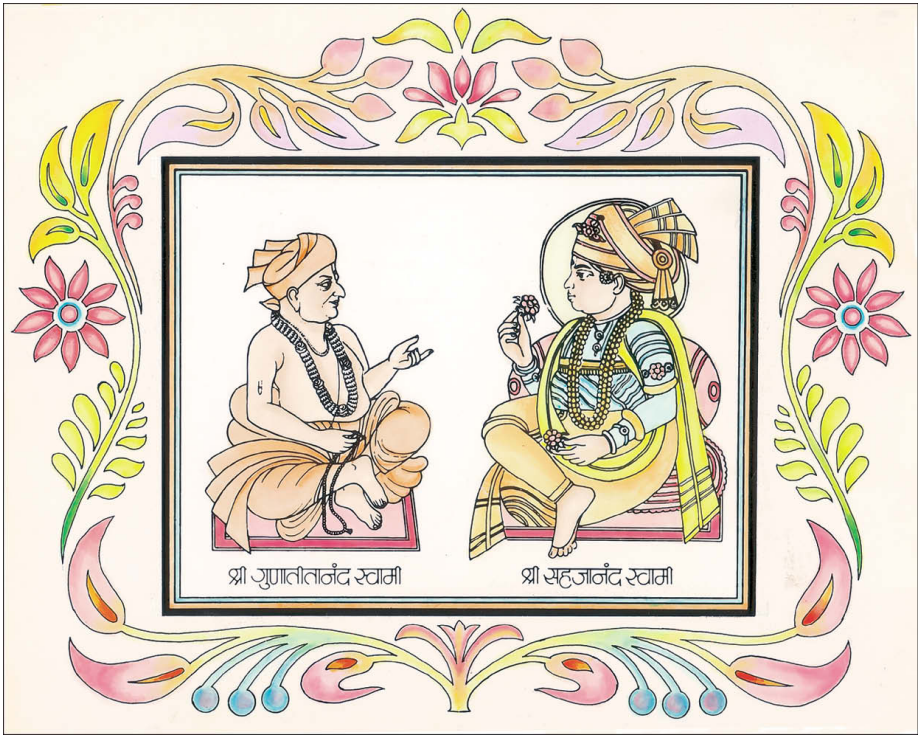
Daily worship rituals of *satsang,* prayers, *mansi* puja, *chestha,* brief life sketches of *paramhansas* and devotees, history, traditions and shastras are described in this book in a lucid language. This book will provide a greater understanding of and attachment to Satsang.

This publication in English is a translation of the Gujarati book *Kishore Satsang Pravin*.

This book has been designed to serve as part of the curriculum for the Satsang Examinations. More specifically, it is one of the textbooks for the fourth level examination, Satsang Pravin.

It is our earnest prayer that all *satsangis* study this book carefully, pass the examinations with flying colours, and above all, derive immense spiritual benefits and please Bhagwan Swaminarayan and guru Pramukh Swami Maharaj.

- Swaminarayan Aksharpith



Ame sau Swāminā bālak, marishu Swāmine māte;
Ame sau Shrijitanā yuvak, ladishu Shrijine māte...
Nathi dartā nathi kartā, amārā jānni parvā;
Amāre dar nathi koino, ame janmyā chhie marvā...ame 1
Ame ā yagna ārambhyo, balidāno ame daishu;
Amārā Akshar Purushottam, Gunātit jnānne gāishu...ame 2
Ame sau Shriji tanā putro, Akshare vās amāro chhe;
Svadharmi bhasma choli to, amāre kshobh shāno chhe...ame 3
Juo sau motinā Swāmi, na rākhi kai te khāmi;
Pragat Purushottam pāmi, malyā Gunātit Swāmi...ame 4

Translation

Pledge: Ame Sau Swamina Balak...

We are the children of Swami; we will die for him. We are the youths of Shriji Maharaj; we will fight for him. We are fearless; we will not shirk sacrificing our lives, for we are born to die. We have launched this movement and will undergo any suffering. We will sing the praises of Akshar-Purushottam.

We are the sons of Shriji Maharaj; we have our abode in Akshar. Consecrated as we are to *swadharma* (religious faith), we have no apprehension whatsoever. Lord Purushottam and Akshar, Gunatitanand Swami, are with us. We have accomplished our

goal.

1. Shikshapatri

Special Duties of Householder Devotees

Householders should not touch widows who are not members of their own family. Householder disciples should never remain in the private company of their youthful mother, sisters, or daughters except in an emergency. Even when in danger they should remain with women only for as long as necessary to provide them protection. This precept is to be followed even by those who are scholarly and learned in the shastras.

Padmāsanopi kāmena vyākulātmā nijātmajām;
Drashtvā Saraswatim moham prāpa nindām cha durdashām.

"The creator Brahma, who always remains seated in a lotus posture, was lured by the charms of his own daughter Saraswati and came to disrepute and public slander."

Householders should not give away their wives to others, since this violates the wife's vow of fidelity. Those who indulge in such actions are condemned as sinners. Thus, Maharaj improved the status of women in society by teaching observance of chastity to his disciples and made them lead a sublime life. This earned women a special status in the society (135-137).

Na vidyate tithirdvādasyādir niyatā yasyetyatithihi.

Householders should serve guests who at 's their home without any prior intimation with food according to one's own means. They should perform the sacrificial rites according to the rules laid down by the shastras to propitiate gods and ancestors. This shows Shriji Maharaj's insistence upon adherence to the ancient traditions of our religion and culture (138).

Devotees should serve their parents, stepparents, guru and sick persons till one's last breath. Great merit lies in such service. During his sojourns in the forests, Shriji Maharaj had served Sevakram sincerely. In the same spirit, Jhinabhai had served Kamalshi Vanza who was ill. Therefore, when Jhinabhai passed away, Shriji Maharaj rewarded his good action by lifting his coffin on his own shoulder and demonstrated to all the fruits of selfless service. While he was at Vartal, Aksharbrahman Gunatitanand Swami, too, used to serve the sick sadhus and wash their bed sheets and soiled clothes. Service is the purest form of worship. Such is the glory of selfless service (139).

Devotees should choose vocations suitable to their ability, but should not try to imitate those of greater or less means than themselves. Farmers should never castrate their bulls (140).

Devotees should store foodgrains and save money for future use in times of need and so prevent incurring debt. In the same way, those who own cattle should store sufficient fodder. Those devotees who rear cattle should properly attend to their needs for grass, water, etc. If they unable to care for the cattle, they should be given away to those who have means to take due care (141-142).

Devotees should undertake transactions in land, property or money in writing, with due attestation by two reliable and respectable persons of good character. Even while solemnizing marriages witnesses should be kept. This will prevent quarrels and save suits in the law courts (143-144).

Devotees should plan their expenses according to their income. They should never spend more than they earn, since this leads to debts, which in turn causes miseries. They should maintain in their own legible handwriting an account of their income and expenditure. If the accounts books are in the charge of other people, there is the possibility of being deceived. In Vachanamrut, Gadhada I 38, Shriji Maharaj has instructed us to maintain an account of our endeavours on the spiritual path, too (145-146).

Devotees should donate one-tenth of their income or of their agricultural products to the mandir. Those who are not so well off should donate one-twentieth part. Such donations purify their wealth. Profits and products which are not shared in such a manner corrupt the possessor and his virtues are diminished (147).

The observance of *vrats* like *ekadashi, Hari navmi, chandrayan*, etc. should be concluded by performing religious rites such as *mahapuja*, *brahmabhojan* and donations according to one's means. This brings the desired fruits from observance of these *vrats*. Lord Shiva should be worshipped in the month of Shravan. Disciples should feel the presence of all the deities in their *ishtadev,* Bhagwan Swaminarayan, and should worship him devoutly to earn the highest merits (148-149).

Taking money belonging to the mandir diminishes one's merits. Therefore, one should never borrow money from the mandir; nor should they take utensils ornaments, clothes, vehicles, bricks, stones and the like for their own use from the mandir (150).

Disciples who visit the mandirs or approach the sadhus or preceptors for darshan, should never accept food served by other outsiders either in the mandirs or enroute. These days we have to accept food from others. In such cases we can free ourselves from their debt by donating for the food that we accept. While engaged in some service in the mandir there is no harm in accepting food there (151).

Devotees shall regularly pay the wages due, either in cash or kind, regularly and at the agreed rate, to those labourers employed in their service. However, one should not be greedy and pay less than agreed. While paying off debts always do it in writing and with proper attestation by two witnesses. Devotees should never conceal their own lineage and the details of their daughter's marriage. Devotees should invite the presence of relatives on the marriage occasion of their daughters (152).

In the event of a famine or trouble from the enemy or oppression by a king, which is likely to harm one's prestige, property or life, you should quit such place at once, even if that be your native place or your bread-earner, and migrate to a place where there is no such harassment (153-154).

Wealthy devotees should perform *ahimsak yagnas* as recommended by Bhagwan Swaminarayan. During their pilgrimage to holy shrines built by Shriji Maharaj or his *brahmanized* Sadhus, they should feed Brahmins, sadhus, *brahmacharis*, *parshads* and devotees on Punam or on the day following *ekadashi* fast or during religious festivals.

They should offer robes to the ascetics. They should sponsor religious festivals also. They should give donations to the mandirs and alms to deserving Brahmins and poor devotees (155-156).

Special Duties for Rulers

The *satsangi* rulers, in conformity with the tenets of the scriptures, should look after the welfare and protection of their subjects and treat them as their own children. They should righteously consolidate religious tenets in their kingdoms by building mandirs and publishing religious books. The *satsangi* rulers should be fully aware of the seven basic constituents for successfully governing the state: king, ministers, friends, treasury, regions, forts and the strength of the army. They should also possess the essential qualities of how to appease, bribe, punish and spy. They must also know how to negotiate peace, how to attack, how to fight and split the enemy army, to seek support of the strong in the face of imminent defeat, and to seek shelter in the fort if loosing the battle. They should be diplomatic and must know where to send spies, appoint intelligent and practical people as ministers, distinguish between good and bad people and punish them according to their attributes and actions by appointing worthy judges. They should be able to distinguish between offenders and the innocent (158).

Shriji Maharaj has laid down five cardinal codes of conduct for the householders: not to consume intoxicants, not to eat flesh, not to steal, not to commit adultery, and not to violate the codes of social purity.

Special Duties of Married Women

Married women should serve their husbands, be they blind or ailing or impotent, in the manner in which they worship and serve God. They should never speak harshly to them. Under no circumstances should the married women cultivate friendship with handsome, youthful and virtuous men. Married women should dress in such a manner that no part of their body remains exposed. They should never bathe with their clothes off. They should never go to see provocative films or plays. They should never keep the company of adulterous women.

Women whose husbands are away from home should not put on ornaments and rich clothes nor visit other people and should abstain from gossip and frivolity. All these tenets are important in maintening the chastity of women (159-162).

Special Duties of Widows

Widows should serve God with the same fidelity with which they served their husbands and should always obey their elders. If there is no elderly person in the family, they should remain under the authority of their son. They should abstain from the touch of any male who may not be their nearest relative. There is no harm in touching a suckling male infant. Under special circumstances the widows may talk to or touch old men. Even for the sake of attaining knowledge no relationship with male members should be maintained. They should try to please God by practising austerity and observing fasts. Widows should keep sufficient funds for their own maintenance

and only surplus should be given in charity. The widows should wear suitable clothes according to the social traditions. They should always move in the company of noble women and should never participate in festivals like Holi in which males and females mix freely with one another. Both married women and widows should strictly follow the rules and sanctions prescribed by the scriptures to be observed during the menstruation period (163-174).

Special Duties of Renunciants

Those who observe the *brahmacharya* (eightfold celibacy) throughout their lives are called *naishthik brahmacharis*. A *naishthik brahmachari* who observes eightfold celibacy does not: (1) indulge in talks about women, (2) discuss their virtues or talents, (3) engage in fun and laughter with them, (4) look at them with intent, (5) seek their company, even in private, (6) think of them, (7) discriminate them according to age or appearance and (8) indulge sexually with them. These are the eight basic rules governing *naishthik brahmacharis*.

A *naishthik brahmachari* should avoid all contact or talk with women and should never cast a glance at them lustfully nor listen to talks about them nor bathe at a place which is frequented by women.

A *naishthik brahmachari* should never touch any statue or picture of women except those of goddesses like Radhikaji, Lakshmiji and others. He should thus protect his eightfold celibacy. Even during religious discourses addressed to male devotees, a *naishthik brahmachari* should not refer to women who are at a distance from him. Such references do affect his mind and he is in danger of going astray from the path of eightfold celibacy.

A *naishthik brahmachari* is under no obligation of obeying his guru's commands if they are likely to dislodge him from his vows of eightfold celibacy. The Smrutis say, *"Sarvathā pālaniyaiva sishyairāgnā guroriha",* meaning, a disciple must always carry out the commands of his master. But Shriji Maharaj clarifies, "With all due respect to one's guru one should not carry out his command if it is likely to dislodge one from the vows of celibacy."

Once Shriji Maharaj asked Nishkulanand Swami to go and address an assembly of women. But he did not go. So Shriji Maharaj called him and warned, "Muni, if you do not carry out my command you will be excommunicated." Nishkulanand Swami replied politely with folded hands, "Maharaj, I am prepared to face excommunication for defying your order, but I am not willing to be excommunicated by transgressing the rules of celibacy by addressing a gathering of women." Maharaj was greatly pleased to hear Nishkulanand Swami's reply. A *brahmachari* should ever lead a steadfast, contented and humble life (175-180).

While Shriji Maharaj was dwelling on the earth, certain evil-minded people, with a view to harass the sadhus and make them observe fasts, used to send women to them. Thereupon, Shriji Maharaj declared that such women should be avoided by insulting them. But at the same time, he called upon the sadhus to protect helpless women even by touching them. There is no sin in touching women when their life is at stake, to

protect them. This shows that Shriji Maharaj did not want his disciples to observe the rules blindly or fanatically. On the contrary, he calls upon them to protect human life which is a means to salvation (181-182).

Naishthik brahmacharis should never massage their bodies with scented oils nor should they carry any arms, as this might lead them to commit violence. They should conquer the sense of taste. This will help them conquer other senses. Even while accepting alms they should avoid accepting from women, and should protect their vows of celibacy (183-184).

Naishthik brahmacharis should overcome desire for the sense pleasures and should study the shastras like the Vachanamrut, Shikshapatri, Swamini Vato, Bhaktachintamani, Harililamrut, Nishkulanand Kavya, Satsangijivan, Harililakalpataru and others. They should serve the guru and other revered people and avoid the company of those people who hanker after women (185).

Renunciants should conquer the sense of taste to enable them to observe *nishkam* dharma and control the other senses. They should never keep money nor ask other people to keep money on their behalf. They should not hoard objects that generate money nor make other people hoard such objects on their behalf. Otherwise it breaks the vow of *aparigraha* (non-possession). Attachment to possessions is an impediment in one's path to *moksha* (188-189).

Renunciants should never act as surety nor should they keep deposits for anyone. They should always cultivate patience. They should ensure that their residence is not visited by women. In order to protect their vow of *brahmacharya* and prevent other problems, they should always travel in pairs at night. Even during day time, except while going to answer call of nature or during sheer exigencies, they should always go with a fellow sadhu (190-191).

Renunciants should never wear rich clothes. They should wear thick, coarse, plain, cotton clothes, dyed in saffron colour. Even if devotees insist they should only accept coarse saffron coloured clothes. During cold weather they may use a saffron coloured shawl.

Once, a devotee gave Gopalanand Swami a fine silk dhoti. The devotee insisted, "Swami, please do wear the dhoti." Swami was reluctant to wear it but the devotee would not listen to him. The Swami asked the devotee, "How long do you want me to wear this dhoti?" The devotee replied, "As long as it lasts." Gopalanand Swami tied the dhoti very tight and as soon as he tried to squat, the dhoti ripped. Thus, he satisfied the devotee and protected his vows.

Renunciants should not go to the house householder devotees except to collect alms or to attend satsang assemblies. They should not accept anything without offering it to God (193–195).

Renunciants should not act in a way that encourages others to attend on them, but should lead an austere life like Bharatji. They should not take intoxicants such as tobacco, opium, hashish, etc. They should not accept food from devotees during the purification period due to birth or death. They should not sleep on beds. They should for ever be polite, humble and cooperative. They should never be deceitful (196–200).

Renunciants should always be forgiving. Even when they are attacked or abused they should never retaliate. On the contrary they should pray for the well-being of such people. A sadhu's life is for the benefit of others, so how can he ever wish ill of others?

Aksharbrahman Gunatitanand Swami had blessed Uga Khuman, who had abused, insulted and beaten him and the other sadhus. As a result of his blessings Jivna Khuman was born as Uga Khuman's son; Jivna Khuman became an *ekantik bhakta* of Shriji Maharaj.

The people of Anand had hurled insults at Shriji Maharaj and the sadhus, but they tolerated it all and prayed that they become *satsangis*.

The duty of sadhus is to be forgiving. They should never forget this (201).

Sadhus should never act in a way that causes conflict in society; they should not work as agents or spies nor should they indulge in backbiting or eavesdropping; they should not reveal the secrets of others. Such negative behaviour affects the humility of a sadhu, causing him mental agony and disrupting his worship to God. They should develop non-attachment and rise above 'I-ness' and 'mine-ness'. They should eradicate their ego (202).

Thus Shriji Maharaj has laid down five *vartmans* – codes of conduct – for sadhus: *nishkam, nirlobh, nisswad, nissneh* and *nirman*.

2. Prayer

(Rāg Bilaval)
Jayasi Narayan sarva kāran sadā
Jayasi Aksharpati antaryāmi;
Jayasi dharmātmaja pragat Purushottam
Jayasi Sahajanand sukhad Swami.....Jaya. 1
Ratat dashashatavadan nigam āgam sadā
Jayasi twam namat sura shish nāmi;
Jayasi tvam bhajat muni bhakta nishkām jana,
Jayasi dātār kaivalyadhāmi.....Jaya. 2
Kāla maya purush rachat brahmānd bahu,
Param purush tava drashti pāmi;
Hota palan pralaya tava bhrakuti bhanga kari,
Jayasi Sarveshwara aham namāmi.....Jaya, 3
Jayasi Kamalpati jayasi naishthik jati,
Jayasi tvam bhajat purush akāmi;
Jayasi Parameshwara tava charan sharan me,
Āyo Premanand garudgāmi.....Jaya. 4

3. Uka Khachar

"Tut, tut! See, some dog has spoilt this stage where Maharaj sits while addressing the assembly. Now where will he sit? This is really very bad! But we are helpless! After all a dog is a dog."

When the devotees were on their way to Akshar Ordi in Gadhada for the regular morning darshan of Maharaj they saw a dog's night soil lying on the platform to be used by Maharaj, commented to each other as above and continued. Nobody wanted to clean the platform because they knew that they would have to take a bath again before going for the darshan of Maharaj. In the Akshar Ordi, Shriji Maharaj asked the devotees to sit before him.

After some time Uka Khachar, who was returning from the River Unmatt Ganga after taking his morning bath, passed by the same platform under the neem tree. He saw that it had been soiled by a dog. Without uttering a single word, he brought some water and swept the platform clean. He returned to the Ghela River and once again took a bath. When he went for the Maharaj's darshan, Maharaj asked him, "Bhaktaraj, why are you late today? you are always punctual! I hope you have not become a late riser."

Maharaj insisted that his devotees get up early in the morning before sunrise. Uka Khachar served everyone. So he remained silent. But one of the devotees explained why he was late and narrated how he had washed the dog's night soil off Maharaj's platform. People thought, "Maharai will rebuke him for coming late." But Maharaj became very happy when he heard the story, embraced Uka Khachar and imprinted his lotus feet on his chest. Then Maharaj turned towards the devotees and remarked, "All of you had seen the dog's night soil on the platform under the neem tree and had perhaps talked about it among yourselves. But none of you thought of cleaning it. Only those who are convinced about my glory and have an inclination to serve like Uka Khachar can perform such duties, but others cannot."

Uka Khachar was a dedicated servant. Every morning he and his wife would get up early and sweep the road leading from Dada Khachar's *darbar* to the River Unmatt Ganga. They would remove all the thorns and stones from the path so that Maharaj and the sadhus would not get hurt while going for their morning bath. In summer, they used to sprinkle water after sweeping the road to settle the dust.

Uka Khachar's name is remembered in the whole of the Sampradaya for his selfless services and humility. Shriji Maharaj was so pleased with his service that in Vachanamrut, Gadhada II 25, he says, "Just as Uka Khachar has become addicted to serving the sadhus, in the same way, if one becomes addicted to serving God and his Sadhu to the extent that one would not be able to stay for even a moment without serving them, then all of the impure desires in one's *antahkaran* will be destroyed." 'Addicted' means that one can't live without it.

Praise to Uka Khachar and his devout service!

4. Adbhutanand Swami

The life of Adbhutanand Swami was indeed great. He was born in a village called Kadu, near Lakhtar, in the Surendranagar District. Shriji Maharaj and his sadhus sanctified the lake situated on the outskirts of this village by frequently bathing in it. As a householder, Swami was known by the name of Kalyandas. His father was Sangha Patel and mother was called Devubai.

In V.S. 1852, when Ramanand Swami celebrated the Annakut festival at Mancha Khachar's house in Kariyani, Kalyandas and his uncle had gone there and were initiated into the Satsang fold by Ramanand Swami. After the return of Ramanand Swami to Akshardham, Kalyandas had his first darshan of Shriji Maharaj at Mangrol. Kalyandas was greatly influenced by his maternal uncle, Aja Patel, of village Methan. Kalyandas developed a firm dedication towards the Satsang from his uncle, but his father was not a *satsangi*. Mother Devuba had some interest in Satsang and she used to sing devotional songs, but this was never appreciated by her husband. Devuba had suffered a lot throughout her life on account of her husband's ill temper. Even then she had taken great pains to infuse devotional fervour in her sons.

Sangha Patel was socially well-placed and was very happy. As Kalyandas came of age, his marriage was solemnized at the village Methan. When the ceremonies were going on under the guidance of Aja Patel, he received an urgent letter from Maharaj. The messenger brought a letter commanding Mancha, Sura, Somla, Alaiya, Mulu, Naja, Matra, Mamaiya, Aja, Jiva, Virdas, Ladha, Kala, Karamshi, etc. to immediately leave their work in the field or town, "If you are taking your meals, leave it; if you are busy doing some important work, quit it and start immediately from wherever you are and in whatever condition you may be. *Karmayogi, sankhyayogi* devotees, all those who are willing to renounce should rush to me. This is my sincere desire. If a prince wants to join you, tell him, stay at home; but if he is eager to renounce, let him do so. We will face the wrath of the king." As soon as Aja Patel read the contents of this letter, he decided to honour Shriji Maharaj's commands.

When Kalyandas came to know about Maharaj's message, he asked for the letter and read it again and again. He, too, decided to renounce. But Aja Patel asked him, "Where is your name in this letter?" Kalyandas immediately replied, "The word 'etc.' includes me too." Aja Patel could not dissuade his nephew. All his relations and in-laws tried their best and requested Kalyandas not to spoil such an auspicious ceremony. But Kalyandas would not budge. Without seeking anybody's permission he accompanied his maternal uncle and left for Jetalpur to see Ramdas Swami and from there they departed for Bhuj as desired by Shriji Maharaj.

Shriji Maharaj accorded a grand reception to the newly initiated *paramhansas* and embraced each one of them with great affection. He paid compliments to each one of them. Then he turned to Kalyandas and inquired, "Why has he come? Had I mentioned Kalyandas' name in my letter?" Kalyandas politely replied, "O Maharaj, you had written that '*karmayogi, sankhyayogi* devotees all should leave. I will be much pleased by your action.' Therefore, instead of clinging to the short-lived joys of the worldly life, I have come to please you." Maharaj quickly read his mind and called him to sit by his side. He removed the wedding ties from his wrist, gave him sadhu *diksha* and said,

"you have done what nobody else can do, therefore your name shall be Adbhutanand." With these words Shriji Maharaj blessed him. As commanded by Shriji Maharaj, after renunciation he went to his native village of Kadu and also to the village of his in-laws, Methan, to collect alms and thus emerged successful from these difficult tests.

His wife was greatly impressed by his unique action and she also led a life of absolute celibacy throughout her life.

However, his brother, Vajubhai, arrived at Vartal with his cart to persuade him to return home. But Adbhutanand Swami talked to him so effectively about *vairagya* for five days that he, too, instead of returning home, took up the path of renunciation. He was named Nishkamanand Swami.

Another brother, Vitthalbhai, thought. "Let me go to Vartal. I will have darshan there and bring back my brother." With this idea he came to Vartal, but he too was deeply touched by the Swami's talks and he also renounced. He was given the name of Chaitanyanand Swami Junior. Their fourth brother Kuberdas, too, wanted to renounce, but Shriji Maharaj commanded him to look after the family, so he led the life of a householder.

Adbhutanand Swami extensively toured the regions of Kutch and Gujarat and spread Satsang among the people there. When nobody was prepared to accept the duties of Mahant at Dholera, he willingly obeyed Maharaj's commands and became the Mahant. The economic condition of village Varna in Bhal region was very bad. So Adbhutanand Swami installed the miraculous *murti* of Sankat Bhanjan Hanumanji.

In V.S. 1939, when *guruhari* Shastriji Maharaj took initiation into the sadhu-fold, Adbhutanand Swami was still alive. Shastriji Maharaj served him in Vartal. Adbhutanand Swami passed away to Akshardham in V.S. 1939.

His life is a source of inspiration for the renunciants and householder devotees.

5. Sadhus and Parshads

Sadhus

Bhagwan Swaminarayan has considered all devotees worthy of receiving initiation into the sadhu-fold. The sadhus of Swaminarayan Sampradaya have earned great reverence from everyone by observing the most austere eightfold principles of absolute celibacy. Since wealth and women are considered as the source of all conflicts in this world, Shriji Maharaj set a great example by presenting ideal sadhus who are vowed to follow absolute celibacy and to renounce women and wealth. Referring to such ascetics Shriji Maharaj has said, "If an ascetic keeps even a penny in his possession or prompts others to hoard money for him, he is guilty of slaying ten thousand cows." We know how in the past the great rishis like Vashistha, Sahastrarjun, Vishvamitra, Parashar, Saubhari, Chyavan and others fell from their spiritual heights due to their momentary contact with wealth and women.

If a sadhu accidentally comes into contact with a woman, he can purify himself by

taking bath and observing a fast as atonement. If he touches wealth, he must wash his hands with dust. Sadhus have been commanded to always move in pairs and shun solitude. If circumstances force them to remain in solitude even for a while, they must purify themselves by observing a fast.

The *panch vartmans* (five cardinal rules) for sadhus are enshrined in the Dharmamrut: *nishkam, nisswad, nissneh, nirlobh, nirman*. Also, the rules prescribed in the Shikshapatri and Nishkam Shuddhi are to be observed both in their letter and spirit. A sadhu who lives according to the five cardinal rules, attains the state of *brahmarup* and offers devotion to Shriji Maharaj is revered as an ideal sadhu.

One can easily recognize sadhus of the Swaminarayan Sampradaya by their typical unstitched dress of saffron dhoti, *gatariyu* and *pagh*. These sadhus strictly adhere to the *panch vartmans* laid down by Bhagwan Swaminarayan. They lead an austere life of piety and preach to the devotees not to transgress the codes of dharma. The sadhus are the pillars of satsang. They keep the flame of satsang ablaze and spread the divine message of Shriji Maharaj. They travel to the villages and cities to inspire the devotees towards practicing dharma and devotion, and attaining true knowledge. They teach the devotees to remain spiritually alert and spur their conscience. During the time of Shriji Maharaj, a group of 500 committed *naishthik paramhansas* were initiated by Bhagwan Swaminarayan. They faced many difficulties from disgruntled *bawas* and other people. They tolerated all this and endeavoured to liberate the people of Gujarat from superstitions, evil customs and addictions. They guided the masses onto the right spiritual path and laid a firm foundation for the Swaminarayan Sampradaya. Since then, the true sadhus of the Swaminarayan Sampradaya have continued thisr herculean task without concern for honour or insult, praise or humiliation.

Parshads

The *parshads* are also ascetics who observe *brahmacharya*, but they don white robes. Bhaguji, Miyaji and Ratanji were among the illustrious attendants of Shriji Maharaj. Even though Miyaji was a Muslim, Shriii Maharaj had accepted his service. In the old tradition, *parshads* were allowed to wear stitched clothes. They are allowed to talk to women devotees regarding the affairs of the mandir. They are allowed to manage the mandir money, but not to hoard wealth or touch women. They were permitted to arm themselves to protect the mandirs and to travel alone.

Brahmaswarup Shastriji Maharaj and Yogiji Maharaj made certain changes in the code of conduct for the parshads. The *parshads* now observe all the rules meant for sadhus. They observe the eightfold renunciation of wealth and women, and cannot travel without a companion. By introducing such austere rules the status of the *parshads* in the Satsang has been raised. The *parshads* are now respected in the same way as the sadhus.

In the BAPS, the *parshsad diksha* is a preliminary stage before the renunciant is initiated into the sadhu-fold.

6. Morning Bhajans

(Rāg Kedar)

I

Dhyān dhar dhyān dhar, Dharmāna putranu,
Je thaki sarva santāp nāse;
Koti ravi chandrani kānti jhānkhi kare,
Evā tārā ura vishe Nāth bhāse.
Dhyān dhar... 1
Shira par pushpano mugat sohāmano,
Shravanpar pushpanā guchchha shobhe;
Pushpanā hārni pankti shobhe gale,
Nirakhatā bhaktanā man lobhe.
Dhyān dhar... 2
Pachrangi pushpanā kankan kar vishe,
Bāhye bajubandha pushpa kerā;
Charanamā Shyāmane nupura pushpanā,
Lalit tribhangi shobhe ghanerā.
Dhyān dhar... 3
Ango anga pushpanā ābharan paherine,
Dās par maherni drashti kartā;
Kahe chhe Muktanand bhaja dradha bhāvashu,
Sukhtanā sindhu sarve kashta hartā.
Dhyān dhar... 4

II

Preet kar preet kar pragat Parabrahmashu,
Parahara avar pampāl prāni;
Parokshthi bhavatano pār āve nahi,
Veda Vedānta kahe satya vāni.
Preet kar...1
Kalpataru sarvanā sankalp satya kare,
Pāse jai preetshu seve jyāre;
Tem je pragat Purushottam prichhashe,
Thāshe harijan tatkāla tyāre.
Preet kar... 2
Pragatne bhaji bhaji pār pāmya ghanā,
Gidh, gunikā, kapivrund koti;
Vrajtani nār vyabhichār bhāve tari,
Pragat upasana sahuthi moti...
Preet kar... 3
Swaminārāyan nāmane parhari,

Jār bhajanār sarve khvār thāshe;
Kahe chhe Muktanand pragat bhaj prāniya,
Aghatanā ogh tatkāl jāshe.
Preet kar... 4

7. Obstinacy, Egotism and Jealousy

Aksharbrahman Gunatitanand Swami preached that obstinacy, egotism and jealousy were responsible for one's spiritual fall and degeneration. They are great impediments on the path of spiritual progress. One whose aim is to attain realization of God cannot afford to be obstinate, egoistic or jealous of God or his devotees. Shriji Maharaj has directed that one should give up one's wishes and be humble before the devotees of God. One who nurtures any one of these evil traits is bound to come to grief and fall from Satsang. The following stories illustrate this point.

1. Faiba of Machhiav

Faiba was a staunch devotee of Shriji Maharaj. She was respected by young and old alike in her village, Machhiav. Mulji Brahmachari, Shriji Maharaj's personal attendant, also hailed from Machhiav. Machhiav had become so dear to Shriji Maharaj on account of these beloved devotees that he visited the village 32 times.

Faiba was not on good terms with her daughter-in-law. She drove her away to her parent's home and all relations were severed. The parents and her daughter-in-law were also devotees of Shriji Maharaj. They approached Maharaj and requested him to use his influence and help them reconcile with Faiba. Shriji Maharaj readily agreed and said, "Let us go to Machhiav and persuade Faiba to accept the daughter-in-law back in her house." With these words, he set out for Machhiav in the company of some two hundred sadhus and devotees. On his way, he stopped at the village Melan where the daughter-in-law lived with her parents. Maharaj called her and asked, "Will you do as I say?" She replied, "O Maharaj, I am at your command. I will do whatever you and my mother-in-law ask me to do. I will not object to even being sold away to others by you and my mother in-law. I will do anything that will please you." Maharaj was assured of her sincerity, and headed for Machhiav.

Faiba welcomed Maharaj with great pomp and devotion. She had *shiro-puri* and other rich delicacies prepared for Maharaj and his retinue of sadhus and devotees. When Shriji Maharaj reached Machhiav, Dalsukhrambhai was offering worship to Lalji, but Faiba was seated there. She received Maharaj with great affection and escorted him into the house. While Shriji Maharaj was climbing the stairs, Faiba and Dalsukhrambhai touched his feet and awaited his command. Maharaj turned to Faiba and asked, "Faiba, would you agree to what I am going to propose?" Faiba readily agreed and replied, "Maharaj, let your will prevail." Shriji Maharaj suggested, "Please go and bring your daughter-in-law home and allow her to stay happily with you."

Faiba could not accept this. She replied, “How can I do that? It seems you have been misguided and misinformed by that woman.” Thereupon, Shriji Maharaj observed, “What do you think about me?” Faiba became rigid and replied, “Maharaj, you are the supreme Godhead, you are the fountainhead of all the incarnations; but you should not interfere because you will not understand this dispute between mother-in-law and daughter-in-law. So, please drop this discussion.”

Shriji Maharaj did not like this. He did not approve of Faiba’s obstinacy. He once again tried to convince her by saying, “If you don’t reconcile with your daughter-in-law, then the sadhus and devotees will not dine at your house. I will also not eat and will leave from here.”

But Faiba would not see reason. She did not budge. She replied, “Maharaj, you are the Master. Do whatever you wish, but I am unable to comply with your suggestion.”

Maharaj was very unhappy that Faiba was being so obstinate. He said, “Jai Sachchidanand.” Then he turned to the sadhus and devotees and said, “Let us go.” Thus the holy company left Machhiav without eating. They had their meals in a neighbouring village.

After this incident, Maharaj never visited Machhiav again. Even today, no sadhu or devotee visits this village. Faiba’s obstinacy earned the displeasure of Maharaj. Therefore, all of us should cultivate such faith in our Supreme Godhead that we are able to obey his commands, whether we like them or not.

2. Alaiya Khachar of Jhinjhavadar

In Jhinjhavadar, a small village at a distance of five miles from Gadhada, there lived a staunch devotee of Bhagwan Swaminarayan. His name was Alaiya Khachar. Maharaj was so pleased with his deep devotion and service that he had bestowed upon him his blessings and spiritual powers. He had attained divine powers of putting people in samadhi and revealing to them the heavenly spheres of Vaikunth, Golok, Brahmapur, etc. A mere touch with one end of his stick could put people into samadhi and a touch with the other end would revive people back into consciousness. Alaiya Khachar had drawn some two thousand people into Satsang with his rare spiritual powers.

Once, in Gadhpur, Shriji Maharaj asked Muktanand Swami, “From among Dada Khachar, Sura Khachar, Naja Jogia, Somla Khachar, Alaiya Khachar and other devotees, who do you consider as the greatest devotee? Muktanand Swami was innocent and honest. He thought for a while and replied, “Dada Khachar is the greatest of all the devotees.” Alaiya Khachar thought that he should have been considered the greatest of them all. He thought that he would certainly be ranked as number two. But Muktanand Swami said, “Second is Sura Khachar,” and “Third is Somla Khachar.” Alaiya Khachar was very upset about this. He could not control his anger and reached for the hilt of his sword. But Shriji Maharaj quickly intervened and shouted, “Muktanand Swami, you have failed to understand Alaiya. He is unique. Nobody can be compared with Alaiya who is completely detached. He observes celibacy.” When Alaiya Khachar heard Maharaj praising him he sheathed his sword and became very

happy.

However, Shriji Maharaj has referred to this incident in Vachanamrut, Loya 17, and stated, "If someone has firm faith in God but lacks an extreme aversion towards the *vishays* and is still attracted to them, then even if a person like Muktanand Swami were to denouncethose objects, he would go as far as to cut off the person's head with a sword."

Once, Shriji Maharaj was playing water sports with the devotees in the Unmatt Ganga. They were playing hide and seek. Suddenly Shriji Maharaj dived into the water, toppled the big-bellied Alaiya Khachar and untied his loin cloth with his toes. Alaiya became naked and felt very embarrassed. Meanwhile, Maharaj had disappeared and after some time he surfaced at a spot far away from Alaiya. Everyone burst into laughter. Alaiya Khachar, instead of joining his friends in their joke, felt insulted. He thought that Shriji Maharaj had deliberately played mischief with him to humiliate him in the presence of fellow devotees. He started abusing Maharaj and left the place in anger. He approached devotees whom he had drawn into Satsang and started saying, "Don't go to Gadhada in search of God. He is no God; he is just an ordinary Purabiya Brahmin." Thus he led many devotees away from Maharaj.

But when he heard about Shriji Maharaj's departure for his heavenly abode, he grieved very much and repented, "Fie on me. What a misfortune! What a loss! All my austere life of celibacy, all my devotion and service became meaningless because of my ego and false pride. Damn me!" Thus he lamented bitterly as he recalled those great moments which he had spent with Maharaj and his sorrow became all the more tense. He cursed himself. He had undone all that he had achieved in the divine company of Maharaj. He went to Gopalanand Swami and many other senior sadhus, and repented, apologized and requested them to pardon him and receive him back into the Satsang fold.

This story of Alaiya Khachar should be kept in mind and we should all resolve never to allow false pride and ego to separate us from God and his devotees.

3. Jiva Khachar of Gadhada

Dada Khachar's father, Abhal Khachar, and Jiva Khachar were brothers. They had an equal share in the estate of Gadhada. When Shriji Maharaj first arrived in Gadhada, he stayed for some time in the *darbar* of Jiva Khachar. There are innumerable incidents witnessed by people describing the divine exploits of Maharaj while he was the guest of Jiva Khachar. There are many occasions which reveal the deep devotion and love of Jiva Khachar towards Maharaj.

Once it was raining heavily at Gadhpur. The flood waters had entered the town and there was water everywhere. At that time Shriji Maharaj was staying in the *darbar* of Jiva Khachar. Early in the morning, Maharaj wanted to answer the call of nature but it was not possible to go out due to the heavy rains; Jiva Khachar thought for a while and solved the problem by asking Maharaj to use the earthen trench-like pit meant for cooking. It was bitterly cold and the firewood had become wet. Jiva Khachar did not hesitate to cut and burn his precious cot for fuel to provide warmth for his Lord, Shriji

Maharaj. Shriji Maharaj was very pleased with his deep devotion and affection towards him.

Once, while enjoying sugarcane, Shriji Maharaj hurt himself and blood started flowing from his finger. Jiva Khachar tore his turban and wrapped it around the finger as a bandage. Once, while Shriji Maharaj was giving religious discourses, he wanted to spit. Jiva Khachar did not want Maharaj to take the trouble of getting up to spit. So he held out his turban and requested Maharaj to spit into it. Such was his devotion and sincere dedication. But the same Jiva Khachar could not tolerate Maharaj's going away to stay with Dada Khachar. Shriji Maharaj was drawn by the even greater devotion, service and love of Dada Khachar. Jiva Khachar's devotion and love were being devoured by the demon of jealousy. He became jealous and started opposing Maharaj.

Shriji Maharaj was very eager to build a mandir on the hillock on the banks of the River Ghela. The land was the joint property of Dada Khachar and Jiva Khachar. When Shriji Maharaj asked Jiva Khachar to give that piece of land to him, he gave his consent. However, when Maharaj insisted upon making a legal document, Jiva Khachar backed out saying, "Maharaj! This hillock is of strategic importance. Therefore, choose some other site for the mandir." Dada Khachar had already put his signature, but out of sheer jealousy Jiva Khachar could not give the land on the hill to Shriji Maharaj.

This venom of jealousy affected Jiva Khachar so much that he thought of killing Shriji Maharaj to punish his nephew Dada Khachar. He bribed a Kathi called Ram Khachar by promising him to give some land and cash and persuaded him to finish off Shriji Maharaj. One dark night, Ram Khachar stealthily entered the latrine which was being used by Maharaj. He stood there with a drawn sword in his hand awaiting Maharaj. Usually, Maharaj carried a lantern with him into the latrine, but that night Maharaj asked Bhaguji, "Go and leave this lantern in the toilet." Bhaguji failed to understand Maharaj's mind. Maharaj told him, "There is a surprise waitng for you." Bhaguji cautiously approached the toilet and slowly opened the door and to his surprise he saw Ram Khachar standing inside with an unsheathed sword in his hand. Bhaguji realized the significance of Maharaj's words. He caught Ram Khachar and produced him before Maharaj. But Maharaj coolly observed, "He is innocent." Ram Khachar then confessed, "I was instigated and deployed by Jiva Khachar. I am innocent." Shriji Maharaj pardoned him and asked Bhaguji, "Let him go."

When Jiva Khachar was on his death bed, his sister, Amulabai, approached Maharaj and prayed, "Please be merciful and kindly ignore the misdeeds of my brother. Please forgive him and grant him a place in your Dham." Shriji Maharaj gave a smile and observed, "I am not vindictive. If I look to the evil deeds of man, none could be granted salvation. In taking into account the services and devotion of Jiva Khachar, I shall take him to my Dham." With these words the merciful Maharaj took Jiva Khachar to Dham.

If we want to win the favour of our God, we must discard jealousy towards God and his devotees and be humble in our thoughts and actions. Then Maharaj shall certainly shower his love and blessings upon us.

8. Places of Pilgrimage

The cultural history of India is interwoven with the history of her places of pilgrimage. Even today, these holy places, or *tirths,* continue to inspire millions of people.

"Tarati pāpādikam yasmāt." According to this Sanskrit saying, "a place of pilgrimage is one which redeems one from sins and other wrong doings." The atmosphere in a place of pilgrimage is pure and divine. By visiting a *tirth* one experiences peace and purity in one's mind and heart. Such is the glory of places of pilgrimage.

Rivers, lakes and a specified area of land are usually regarded as places of pilgrimage.

Places of pilgrimage are generally of three types:

1. Nitya Tirth: These are certain places which have been revered as places of pilgrimage since the time of creation. These places in themselves possess divine powers and therefore they are called *nitya tirths*. Kailash, Manas Sarovar, Ganga, Yamuna, Narmada, are some of the *nitya tirths*.

2. Bhagavadiya Tirth: These are places where God incarnated or performed divine exploits or appeared before the devotees. Such places are called *bhagavadiya tirths,* since they are associated with God. God is eternal and divine, and wherever he places his divine feet that place becomes divine. Such is the glory of the contact of God's divine feet.

Bhagwan Swaminarayan's birthplace, Chhapaiya in Uttar Pradesh, North India, is such a place of pilgrimage. The places of his childhood exploits have been preserved there intact. Shriji Maharaj also spent some of his childhood in Ayodhya.

Although Bhagwan Swaminarayan was born in North India, his field of spiritual activity was in Gujarat. There are many places that he has sanctified and are revered as places of pilgrimage. These include: Gadhada, Lakshmi Vadi, Vartal, Ahmedabad, Dabhan, Jetalpur, Dholera, Muli, Bhuj and Junagadh. Also there are the *panch tirths,* groups of nearby places in Gujarat, Saurashtra and Kutch are revered as places of pilgrimage because of their association with Shriji Maharaj.

3. Sant Tirth: A God-realized Sadhu possesses all divine powers and is ever liberated and beyond the three bodies, although he appears to be with body made of five material elements. Such a sadhu is in constant communion with God. Therefore all the places that he visits and things that he associates with become holy and are regarded as *tirths*. The birthplace, places of his spiritual activities and the place where he leaves his mortal body are especially revered as places of pilgrimage. Due to such God-realized Sadhus today, India is considered as a place of pilgrimage.

Sage Naradji explains to King Yudhishthir, "*Bhavadvidhā bhāgavatāstirthabhutā swayam vibhoho; Tirthikurvanti tirthāni svāntasthena gadābrutā."* Meaning, "Devotees of

God like you are not only consecrated themselves, but it is they who revive the sanctity of sacred places by the living presence of God in their heart."

As these places are associated with great sadhus they are regarded as holy places. The mere association such sadhus, in whose hearts Shri Hari dwells incessantly, destroys all evils and sins. Such sadhus are called *jangam tirths*, that is, moving places of pilgrimage.

The birthplaces of Aksharbrahman Gunatitanand Swami, Brahmaswarup Bhagatji Maharaj, Brahmaswarup Shastriji Maharaj, Brahmaswarup Yogiji Maharaj, as well as the places of their spiritual activities and the places where they left their physical bodies are revered as places of pilgrimage: Bhadra, Mahuva, Mahelav, Dhari, Bochasan, Sarangpur, Gondal, Atladara, Gadhada, Ahmedabad, Sankari and many other places. In the same way, the birthplace and places of spiritual activities of Pragat Brahmaswarup Pramukh Swami Maharaj are also regarded as places of pilgrimage. Every year, innumerable devotees go to these old and new holy places and attain peace, prosperity and piety in their lives.

9. Shri Dharmik Stotram

Shri Vāsudeva-vimalāmruta dhāmavāsam,
Nārāyanam narakatāran-nāmdheyam;
Shyamam sitam dvibhujameva chaturbhujam cha,
Tvām Bhakti-Dharmatanayam sharanam prapadye. 1

O glorious son of Bhakti and Dharma! Who dwells in the divine, pure Akshardham; O Narayan! the liberator of the souls from hell; O Divine Creator! Luminous with fair and dark complexion; O Supreme Being with two hands, at times displaying four hands; unto you I seek shelter and to you do I surrender myself completely.

Shikshārthamatra nijabhaktimatām narānām,
Ekānta dharmamakhilam parishilayantam,
Ashtāngayoga kalanāshcha mahāvratāni,
Tvām Bhakti-Dharmatanayam sharanam prapadye. 2

O illustrious son of Bhakii and Dharma, who, with a sole desire to teach pure truth to his devotees, has attained mastery over ashtanga-yoga and the pure Ekantik Dharma and practices the virtues of non-violence and *brahmacharya* to instil them in his devotees; unto you I seek shelter and to you do I surrender myself completely.

Shavāsena sākamanulomaviloma vrutyā,
Svāntarbahishcha bhagavatyurudhā nijasya;
Pure gatagatajalāmbudhinopameyam,
Tvām Bhakti-Dharmatanayam sharanam prapadye. 3

O mighty son of Dharma and Bhakti, who could be compared to the great ocean

into which the water goes in tide and from which the same water recedes; in the same manner unto you, O my Lord my mind goes and returns with every breath; unto you I seek shelter and to you do I surrender myself completely.

Bāhyāntarindriyagana shvasanādhidaiva,
Vrutyudbhavasthitilayānapi jāyamānān;
Sthitvā tatah svamahasā pruthageekshamānam,
Tvām Bhakti-Dharmatanayam sharanam prapadye. 4

O divine son of Bhakti and Dharma, O presiding deity of external and internal senses and *prana*. O sustainer and controller of the different *vruttis* which are caused by these senses and *prana*; you hold them all in your Divine Self and yet while holding them within have kept yourself above them, beyond them and are watching their birth, their existence and their destruction independently; unto you I seek shelter and to you do I surrender completely.

Māyāmayākrutitamo'shubhvāsanānām,
Kartum nishedhamurudhā Bhagavatswarupe;
Nirbija sānkhyamatayoga suyuktibhājam,
Tvām Bhakti-Dharmatanayam sharanam prapadye. 5

O gracious son of Bhakti and Dharma, with firm determination to remove the ignorance that God possesses a corporeal body and evil traits, you have tactfully dealt a severe blow to the baseless arguments extended by both the Sankhya and Yoga schools of thought. Unto you I seek shelter and to you do I surrender myself completely.

Divyākrutitvasumahastva suvāsanānām,
Samyagvidhimprathayitum cha patau ramāyāhā;
Sālambasānkhyapatha yoga suyuktibhājam,
Tvām Bhakti-Dharmatanayam sharanam prapadye. 6

O luminous son of Bhakti and Dharma, you have given unalloyed and straight forward interpretation of Sankhya and Yoga in order to convince people about true divine form of God, his divine traits and supreme glory. Unto you I seek shelter and to you do I surrender myself completely.

Kāmārta-taskara-nata–vyasanidvishantah,
Svasvārthasiddhimiva chetasi nityameva;
Nārāyanam paramayaiva mudāsmaratam,
Tvām Bhakti-Dharmatanayam sharanam prapadye. 7

Just as a lustful person, a thief, an actor, an addict and jealous person turn their attention towards the objects of their interest, in the same way you also incessantly remember Narayan with deep love and devotion. O son of Bhakti and Dharma, unto you I seek shelter and to you do I surrender myself completely.

Sādhvi chakor shalabhāstimikālakantha,

Kokā nijeshtavishayeshu yathaiva lagnā;
Murtau tathā Bhagavatotra mudāti lagnam,
Tvām Bhakti-Dharmatanayam sharanam prapadye. 8

The way an ascetic woman, a Chakor bird, butterfly, fish, peacock and *chakravak* (a bird) are attached to their objects of love, in the same way you remain incessantly absorbed in the divine joy of God. O son of Bhakti and Dharma, unto you I seek shelter and to you do I surrender myself completely.

Snehāturastvatha bhayātura āmayāvi,
Yadvatkshudhātura janashcha vihāya mānam;
Dainyam bhajeyuriha satsu tathā charantam,
Tvām Bhakti-Dharmatanayam sharanam prapadye. 9

The way lovers, the frightened, the sick and the hungry shed their pride and in all humility pray (to overcome their sorrows and attain their material objects), in the same manner, you too, for the spiritual education of your devotees, live humbly before the Param Ekantik Saints and incessantly dwell in Parabrahman. O son of Bhakti and Dharma, unto you I seek shelter and to you do I surrender myself completely.

Dharmasthitai rupagatairbruhatā nijaikyam,
Sevyo Harihi sitamaha sthitadivyamurtihi;
Shabdādyarāgibhiriti svamatam vadantam,
Tvām Bhakti-Dharmatanayam sharanam prapadye. 10

O gracious son of Bhakti and Dharma, you have propounded the philosophy of identity with Akshar and service of Purushottam Shri Hari, the luminous deity dwelling in Akshardham, and who alone is the object of worship for those detached ones, unto you I seek refuge and to you do I surrender myself completely.

Sadgrantha-nityapathana-shravanādisaktam,
Brāhmim cha satsasadasi shāsatamatra vidyām;
Sansārjāla-patitākhil-jeevabandho,
Tvām Bhakti-Dharmatanayam sharanam prapadye. 11

O carrier of the divine wisdom, you are deeply engrossed in the study and understanding of shastras and preach *brahmavidya* to the sadhus; you are saviour to those souls who find themselves entangled in the cobwebs of worldly life. You are like a true brother to the helpless. Unto you I seek refuge and to you do I surrender myself completely.

- Shri Shatanand Muni

(Shantanand Muni was a senior sadhu of Bhagwan Swaminarayan. He was a great scholar and was closely involved in the writing of the famous scripture, Satsangijivan.)

10. Somla Khachar

Darbar Somla Khachar of Botad was one of the choicest devotees of Shriji Maharaj.

Somla Khachar was very well off. He had two virtuous sons and owned a lot of land. He did not have any worries and spent his time happily in the worship of Shriji Maharaj. But it is very difficult to understand the ways of God.

As fate would have it, Somla Khachar lost both his sons one after the other in a short period of time. This extraordinary calamity inflicted an irreparable loss, and increased his family responsibilities. But the enlightened Somla Khachar displayed an unusual courage and patience, despite the tragic loss of his sons. He valued divine happiness more, so he lay all his estate and property at the feet of Shriji Maharaj and offered himself in the service of Shriji Maharaj.

Somla Khachar was tall, well-built and handsome. He carried a precious sword with a golden hilt. But after seeking refuge in the service of Shriji Maharaj he gave up all this pomp and power and led a simple life of austerity, and donned plain white clothes. He sincerely served Shriji Maharaj as a *parshad*. He was fearless and carried out all the commands of Maharaj. However tough or difficult the task may be, he would go wherever necessary and return only after accomplishing his task. Transforming such rugged Kathis into his beloved devotees was a hallmark of Shriji Maharaj's divinity.

There are many incidents which reveal the courage of Somla Khachar. At Khokhra Mahemdabad, the notorious Lolangar had decided to trouble Shriji Maharaj, but Somla Khachar had bravely thwarted all his dirty designs. The troublesome *vairagi bawas* had become jealous of the humble *paramhansas* of Shriji Maharaj, whose sole aim was to free the society from addictions and other vices. These *bawas* used to harass these innocent sadhus by tearing off their clothes, throwing away their begging bowls and beating them. This had become a routine with these mischief-makers.

When Shriji Maharaj, with his 500 *paramhansas* went to village Khokhra, Lolangar Bawa became very angry. With a desire to capture Bhagwan Swaminarayan he attacked the divine entourage with his disciples. But Shriji Maharaj had already sent 400 sadhus away to Surat. When the group of sadhus was returning after taking their morning bath in Lake Kankaria, the *bawas* attacked the sadhus who were unarmed and were singing devotional songs. The *bawas* raised a hue and cry, "Beat them, kill them." As soon as one of the devotees was hurt with a sword, Somla Khachar, the lion among men, followed by ther *parshads*, swept through the attacking *bawas*. There was fierce fighting in which the four leading *bawas* were killed and the rest of them fled the field. Somla Khachar used his valour for a just cause. Such was his support for and devotion towards Shriji Maharaj.

Somla Khachar had realized the divinity of Shriji Maharaj and in Vachanamrut, Kariyani 6 Shriji Maharaj revealed, "Devotees such as Mulji Brahmachari and Somla Khachar and others who have been staying close to me for many years know my nature and realize, 'Besides the devotees of God, Maharaj does not have affection for anyone else.'"

Also, in Vachanamrut, Gadhada III 24, describing the virutes of his male and female devotees, Maharaj says, "Somla Khachar (has) the virtue of always behaving consistently."

Somla Khachar was an exemplary devotee who lived in the presence of Shriji Maharaj and served him according to his wishes, with deep devotion and an understanding of his glory.

11. The Dancing Girl of Jetalpur

Shriji Maharaj was passing through the streets of Jetalpur with a cart loaded with wheat. He wanted to perform a great *yagna* ceremony in Jetalpur, and had desired to feed hundreds of Brahmins. He would stop at every house and give two measures of wheat with a request to grind it into flour. All the devotees readily offered their service and prepared the flour. As Shriji Maharaj wanted to redeem innumerable *jivas*, he would not give more than two measures of wheat to any of the devotees, even though many people desired to grind more wheat.

While passing through the streets of Jetalpur, Maharaj arrived at a spot where a prostitute lived. She was taking rest on her cot, when Maharaj reached her house. As soon as she heard Maharaj talking to the people she came out of her house. No sooner did she behold the luminous figure of Maharaj, than all her mind was drawn towards him. She felt some strange power pulling her towards Maharaj. While remaining on her doorstep, she spoke to Maharaj who was seated on the cart, “O Lord! Are you giving this wheat to the people to grind it into flour?”

“Yes,” said Shriji Maharaj.

“How much will you pay for this work?”

“I don’t pay in cash. I bless those people who help us in our work and bestow upon them my divine bliss.”

“Will you bless me if I grind the wheat?”

“Certainly, provided you do it yourself,” replied Maharaj.

“Then please give me my share.”

Shriji Maharaj gave her two measures of wheat, weighing about 40 kg, to the prostitute. She bathed and cleaned the hand-operated mill herself. Her servants requested her to allow them to do the work for her. They told her, “Let us grind the wheat. You are not used to this type of work, so you will become tired and get blisters on your palms.” But she was determined to earn Shriji Maharaj’s blessings. She firmly told them, “l will do it myself. God himself has commanded me to do it myself.”

She chanted the name of Bhagwan Swaminarayan while grinding the wheat. The hard work made her tired. She began to sweat, but she had resolved to complete the work by next morning, “I will grind all the wheat by tomorrow morning.”

As the grinding of the wheat proceeded, all the impurities from her heart began to disappear. We are all familiar with the instance of Satyakam Jabali. Had he studied any scriptures? He simply carried out the command of his guru and looked after his cows. By the grace of his guru, he attained the highest wisdom. In the same way, this fallen prostitute of Jetalpur had become worthy of receiving redemption from Maharaj.

Without taking food or water and without pausing for rest, she went on milling the wheat throughout the night. Next morning, when the work was over, she took a bath, put on simple clothes, wore no ornaments on her body, and carrying the basket of wheat-flour on her head she went to see Maharaj.

She laid the basket of wheat flour at Maharaj's feet and stood with folded hands. Shriji Maharaj was greatly pleased with her. The prostitute asked Maharaj, "Shall I be worthy of your blessings?" The assembly started grumbling, "She is a prostitute. She is a fallen woman leading an unholy life. She couldn't have ground the wheat herself. She must have made one of her servants do it for her. How can she be blessed?"

But the Lord wanted the assembly to have a glimpse of her clean conscience and pure heart. Therefore, he asked her, "Did you grind the wheat yourself?"

"Yes, my Lord," she replied.

"Show me your palms," said Maharaj. There were blisters on her palms stained with blood. Everone in the assembly was convinced of her sincerity and devotion.

Blessing her, Maharaj said, "You will be liberated the way Muktanand Swami is liberated." People were amazed to see the transformation of the fallen prostitute. They all realized the glory of seeking communion with Shriji Maharaj. Maharaj accepted her invitation and went to her mansion with sadhus and devotees, and dined at her house and sanctified the place.

When such a spontaneous and powerful fountain of devotion sprouts in one's heart, one doesn't need any other means to please God.

12. Scriptures of Our Sampradaya

What are shastras (scriptures)?

Shastras are books that narrate the inspiring lives, messages and commands of God, sadhus, rishis and *acharyas*. Shastras are texts which direct the devotees to lead disciplined lives, and give clear explanations of the philosophy and spiritual knowledge. They are book which enshrine the do's and don'ts of moral conduct and – teach discrimination between right and wrong.

Hinduism has many such scriptures. Of these, Shriji Maharaj has given a special emphasis on the texts written by Bhagwan Veda Vyas. In the Vachanamrut, Gadhada II 58, Bhagwan Swaminarayan says, "A *sampradaya* flourishes … foster the *sampradaya*." With this, Shriji Maharaj instructed his sadhus to compose shastras to the end of their lives.

In the Shikshapatri, Maharaj has accepted the Hindu shastras, especially "The four Vedas, Vyas Sutra, Shrimad Bhagvat, Shri Vishnu Sahasranam and Shri Bhagvad Gita from the Mahabharat, the code of ethics in the Vidur Niti, Shri Vasudev Mahatmya from Vishnu Khand of the Skand Puran and Yagnavalkya Smruti – these eight scriptures are liked by me. All my followers should listen to these eight scriptures and scholars should study, teach and give discourses on these scriptures" (Shikshapatri

93-95).

For devotees of the Swaminarayan Sampradaya the shastras of the Sampradaya provide guidance and inspiration towards understanding of the glory of God and attaining *moksha.* Therefore, we shall study in brief the principal scriptures of the Swaminarayan Sampradaya.

Vachanamrut

The Vachanamrut contains the divine wisdom revealed by Shriji Maharaj. From a purely literary point of view, it has been described as the very first work in Gujarati prose. On many occasions, Bhagwan Swaminarayan had revealed the deep spiritual truths to his devotees. His method of preaching was direct. The intricate wisodm of the scriptures was explained to the common man in a simple, straightforward language with apt illustrations from day-to-day life. His message was so direct that it penetrated straight into the heart of the seeker. At times he would preach directly, and at other times he would give answers to the questions puzzling the seekers. At times, he had to answer questions raised by great scholars and thinkers who had come from some distant regions to seek an explanation. All these divine discourses were faithfully recorded by four of his leading sadhus: the great yogi, Sadguru Gopalanand Swami; the master of shastras, Sadguru Nityanand Swami; the saint among saints, Sadguru Muktanand Swami; and the avatar of Shukdev, Sadguru Shukanand Swami. As a result we have this treasure of divine wisdom in the form of Vachanamrut.

The historicity and authenticity of the Vachanamrut is established by the foresighted compilers, since at the start of each individual Vachanamrut there is a reference to the day and the year, followed by a detailed description of Bhagwan Swaminarayan's dress and the audience being addressed by Shriji Maharaj. This introduction also serves another, more spiritual, purpose. It helps the reader to meditate on the divine form of Shriji Maharaj at the beginning of each discourse.

The Vachanamrut deals with many spiritual subjects: *swadharma, atmajnan, vairagya,* bhakti, glory of God, the divine forms of Brahman and Parabrahman and many other topics giving practical guidance to all spiritual seekers on the spiritual path. The Vachanamrut represents the immortal words of God and is beyond time and space. It is eternally alive. It is capable of solving our problems even today. Shriji Maharaj himself confirms the authenticity and accuracy of the Vachanamrut:

"I have delivered this discourse having experienced it directly myself" (Vachanamrut, Gadhada I 64). "What I am about to say to you, I say not out of any pretence, or out of any self-conceit, or to spread my own greatness" (Vachanamrut, Gadhada II 13). "I have experienced all that I have spoken about. In fact, I speak in accordance to what I practice" (Vachanamrut, Gadhada III 39).

What is unique about the Vachanamrut is that the four sadhus first compiled it into book form and then it was thoroughly examined by Shriji Maharaj himself. Shriji Maharaj was greatly pleased with the work of these sadhus and recognized it as an authentic book of his teachings.

All the places where Maharaj gave his divine discourses have been immortalized in

this shastra. Each section is named after the names of the villages where Maharaj narrated the Vachanamruts. The Vachanamruts delivered at Gadhada are separated into three sections: I, II and III. The sequence and number of Vachanamruts in each section are as follows: Gadhada I – 78 Vachanamruts, Sarangpur – 18, Kariyani – 12, Loya – 18, Panchala – 7, Gadhada II – 67, Vartal – 20, Ahmedabad – 3, and Gadhada III – 39. In all, there are 262 Vachanamruts in the Vartal edition. But the Ahmedabad edition contains 11 additional Vachanamruts narrated in Ahmedabad (5), Ashlali (1) and Jetalpur (5). Thus, in all, there are 273 Vachanamruts.

The disciples of many avatars, sages and rishis have compiled their messages from memory, but the Vachanamrut contains the sacred words spoken by Purushottam Narayan, the supreme Godhead in book form. Aksharbrahman Gunatitanand Swami has rightly said, "To believe thatthere is more worth in anything other than the Vachanamrut is infatuation" (Swamini Vato 4.136).

Shikshapatri

"Ācharaha prathamo dharmaha" – actions are the highest dharma. Purity of actions leads to purity of life. If we remain pure and pious in our daily life, it brings integrity in our character and in turn our spiritual journey towards *moksha* becomes smoother. To gude us on this path, our God, Bhagwan Swaminarayan, has given us the Shikshapatri, which contains the codes of conduct to be observed by all devotees. This great work was composed by Shriji Maharaj himself on the auspicious day of Vasant Panchmi, Maha *sud* 5, Samvat 1882 (12 February 1826 CE). It comprises 212 verses and contains the essence of all the Smriti shastras written by the ancient rishis.

In the Shikshapatri, Shriji Maharaj has laid down the code of conduct for sadhus, householder devotees, married women and widows. If these precepts are sincerely practiced in our day-to-day life, there will be no problems. The Shikshapatri also briefly covers the philosophy of Bhagwan Swaminarayan, and explains the forms of *jiva*, *ishwar*, *maya*, Brahman and Parabrahman. It teaches us how to meditate and worship. Poet Nanalal has rightly observed that Lord Krishna had kept one *sudarshan chakra* (the divine disc) for the protection of his devotees, but Bhagwan Swaminarayan has left 212 *sudarshan chakras* to protect his devotees.

Vedras

From time to time Shriji Maharaj used to write to the *paramhansas* and preach to them indirectly. Vedras is a compilation of these letters. It is divided into five chapters, with one chapter each on *nirlodh, nishkam, nisswad, nissneh* and *nirman*.

In the chapter on *nirlobh*, Shriji Maharaj writes to the *paramhansas*: "In this letter I am writing about *brahmavidya* for your benefit. These thoughts are the inner essence of my teachings and also represent the essence of the Upanishads." Thus, the Vedras is such a great shastra. This book contains the divine wisdom of Shriji Maharaj and is of great help to all in attaining the state of *brahmarup* and experiencing the bliss of liberation during their life on earth.

Aksharbrahman is the divine abode of Bhagwan Purushottam and as the choicest

devotee is eternally in the service of Maharaj. To believe this Aksharbrahman as one's *atma*, and with firm faith to worship Parameshwar is the central message of this shastra. In this great work Shriji Maharaj has pointed toward the golden path of worshipping Purushottam Narayan while retaining servitude to him, rigorously following the vows of *panch vartmans*. One can achieve this by serving and identifying oneself with the manifest form of Aksharbrahman in the form of one's spiritual master.

Swamini Vato

The Swamini Vato are the spiritual talks of Aksharbrahman Gunatitanand Swami, who was the Mahant of Junagadh mandir for forty years. Once, he asked Maharaj, "Which of the four is best: to meditate, to behave as *atma,* to serve the sick or to talk about God?" Maharaj replied, "Talking about God is the best." Thus he commanded Swami to talk to the people about the divine glory of God. The sadhu who is above the temptations of *maya*, out of sheer compassion, shall liberate all from the clutches of *maya* by talking to them about God. Therefore, to use speech in the praise of God is the greatest service. To fulfil this, Swami discoursed, formally and informally, to the people day and night. He never questioned whether the listeners were worthy or not. He would not miss a single opportunity of talking to people about the glory of Shriji Maharaj. Whether he was touring or engaged in routine work in the mandir, he talked continually. He talked to the people on the outskirts of towns and villages, in their fields, or where lime was being processed; Swami revealed the glory of God through his penetrating and convincing talks.

Very often Swami used to say, "These are the revelations of Akshardham. They will grant you liberation from the cycle of births and deaths. They are capable of resolving all doubts and misgivings. These are narrations of divine episodes related to Lord Purushottam. They will abolish the darkness of ignorance." Great devotees like Swami Jaga Bhakta, Thakkar Naran Pradhan, Harishankarbhai Raval, Sadguru Balmukunddas Swami, Sadashankar Amarji and many others who always lived and moved with the Swami had noted down all these talks with great devotion. Afterwards, Gunatitanand Swami instructed Achintyanand Brahmachari to read these talks and himself authenticated them. These divine talks help to understand Vachanamrut more clearly. In a way Swamini Vato is a comprehensive commentary on the Vachanamtut.

In the Swamini Vato, Gunatitanand Swami has revealed the glory and divinity of the supreme Godhead Shriji Maharaj. He has boldly talked about the supremacy of Shriji Maharaj among all the incarnations and clarified any misunderstandings regarding this subject. No other sadguru has displayed so much courage, clarity and commitment as Gunatitanand Swami. Besides this, he has talked emphatically about the importance of *swadharma*, *atmajnan*, futility of sensual pleasures, detachment and bhakti to God with the knowledge of his glory.

These talks were first published by Balmukund Swami in five chapters. Then Krishnaji Ada had them published in seven chapters. The BAPS has also publishes the Swamini Vato based on the latest research and critical study of the original text.

One who has digested the wisdom of the Vachanamrut and Swamini Vato will not

find any difficulty in attaining God-realization and will not find remain deficient in attaining the *gunatit* knowledge. Swami used to say, “These talks are as sharp as the English weapons. A little touch would separate the soul from *maya*.” Brahmaswarup Shastriji Maharaj and Yogiji Maharaj greatly enhanced the glory and eminence of Swamini Vato.

Satsangijivan

Satsangijivan is one of the principal shastras of the Swaminarayan Sampradaya. It is written in Sanskrit and its author is Shatanand Muni. Once, in Gadhpur, he composed some prayer verses and read them out to Maharaj, who became very happy and granted him a boon. Shatanand Muni replied, “Maharaj, I don’t wish to have anything. If you are really pleased with my work, please grant me permission to compose a work depicting your divine exploits on this earth. This will bestow great bliss and I shall feel liberated.” Shriji Maharaj blessed him and instructed him to write such a text.

Shatanand Muni began writing this great shastra on Magshar *sud* 6, Samvat 1885 at Gadhpur. While the work was in progress, he continued to stay in Gadhpur. Everyday he took his work to the leading sadhus and Shriji Maharaj and sought their guidance and approval. Thus, this work became an authentic scripture of the Sampradaya.

The Satsangijivan comprises five chapters depicting the divine exploits of Bhagwan Swaminarayan. It also contains the Dharmamrut and Nishkam Shuddhi, which are very useful for sadhus. The text describes the methods of performing vows like *ekadashi* and *chandrayan*, details about the mode of worshipping God and expiation of sins.

Shatanand Muni has beautifully explained dharma, *jnan*, *vairagya*, bhakti and *upasana*. He has elaborated on the philosophy of Vishishtadvaita. From the Satsangijivan, Brahmaswarup Shastriji Maharaj frequently narrated the story of Kushalkunvarba of Dharampur and Bhalchandra Sheth of Surat to emphasize the importance and significance of bhakti.

Shri Harililakalpataru

The origin of Shri Harililakalpataru has an interesting history. Once Aksharbrahman Gunatitanand Swami had arrived in Vartal from Junagadh for a festival. A small gathering took place around the seat of Raghuvirji Maharaj. Three *champa* flowers were lying on his cushion. When Gunatitanand Swami saw the flowers, he remarked, “Some people can reach this flower, some may reach this second one, but none is able to reach the third one,” With these words, Swami picked up the third flower and gave it to an erudite scholar named Achintyanand Brahmachari and said, “Some people likened Maharaj to Lord Rama, some to Lord Krishna, but they did realize that Shri Hari was the Lord of Akshardham, which is above Vaikunth and Goloka, and the he was the *avatari* of all avatars who had descended in human form on this earth. Therefore, please compose a shastra depicting the supreme glory of Shriji Maharaj.” Achintyanand Brahmachari gratefully accepted the flower from Swami and, without aspiring for name or fame, composed the unique Shri Harililakalpataru in the name of Acharya Shri Raghuvirji Maharaj.

Shri Harililakalpataru describes the divine exploits of Bhagwan Swaminarayan and through them all seekers learn appropriate lessons on dharma, *jnan*, *vairagya* and bhakti and how they should apply these virtues in their lives. The poet has clearly narrated the supreme glory of Shriji Maharaj. He has also described the glory of Gunatitanand Swami as the manifest form of Aksharbrahman, the divine abode of Shriji Maharaj.

In all, there are twelve *skands* and 33,000 *shloks*. The description of Maharaj's *murti* is very graphic and enables the reader to visualize Maharaj in all his divine glory. Maharaj's divine exploits are narrated with such deep devotion that the reader truly experiences Maharaj's divinity in his heart. Achintyanand Brahmachari has enriched the shastra through use of a wide variety of poetic metres and rhythms. It has all the qualities of a great literary work. There is a famous verse in Sanskrit literature:

"Upamā Kālidāsasya bhāraverarthagauravam,
Dandinaha padalāleetyam Māghe santi trayo gunaha."

Analyzing this shastra we see these three rare merits of simile, rich meaning and delicate versification are present in abundance and so Achintyanand Brahmachari has employed literary expertise comparable to the great poet Magha. The sixth *skand* of this shastra is revered as the heart of Shriji Maharaj. This text has been translated into Gujarati by the great scholar Shastri Shvetvaik- unthadasji of Vartal and was published in four volumes with the support of Acharya Shri Anandprasadji Maharaj. Brahmaswarup Yogiji Maharaj also encouraged the publication of this shastra and thus enhanced its glory.

Bhaktachintmani

Nishkulanand Swami composed this shastra in Gujarati. It is in poetic form, chiefly using the famous *chopai* metre. Nishkulanand Swami was born in a remote village called Shekhpat and despite his almost total lack of formal education, by the grace of Shriji Maharaj he was able to compose this and many other shastras and thus reveal his deep devotion towards Maharaj.

There are 164 *prakrans* in this text. Besides depicting the divine exploits of Maharaj, Nishkulanand Swami has vividly described the celebration of Holi and Annakut festivals. He has described in detail the places visited by Maharaj and has listed eminent devotees form the time of Shriji Maharaj and their native towns and villages. Prakaran 64, popularly called Fagva Prakaran, is familiar to all the members of the Sampradaya. Prakarans 76, and 103 to 105 are most important ones because they clearly describe the supreme glory of Maharaj as Purushottam. Prakarans 106 to 110 which deal with topics like freedom from passion, freedom from avarice, freedom from taste, non-attachment and freedom from ego, are also worthy of detailed study. In Prakaran 102, Nishkulanand Swami has paid great tribute to the divine glory of Maharaj and has devoutly narrated his divine exploits. This portrays the deep devotion of Nishkulanand Swami towards Maharaj. For those devotees who ponder upon these glorious divine exploits of Maharaj this shastra is a wish-fulfilling gem and, therefore, it has rightly been called 'Bhaktachintamani' – the wish-fulfilling gem of the devotees.

Brahmaswarup Shastriji Maharaj always instructed the devotees to recite this shastra to help them overcome difficulties.

Nishkulanand Kavya

This collection of poetic works by Nishkulanand Swami contains 22 books, namely: Purushottam Prakash, Sneh Gita, Vachan Vidhi, Saar Siddhi, Bhaktinidhi, Haribal Gita, Hriday Prakash, Dhirajkhyan, Hari Smruti, Chosath Padi, Managanjan, Guna Grahak, Hari Vicharan, Arji Vinay, Kalyan Nirnay, Avatar Chintamani, Chihna Chintamani, Pushpa Chintamani, Lagna Shakunavali, Yama Dand, Vrutti Vivah and Shikshapatri Bhasha.

All these books are of great value. Purushottam Prakash praises the supreme glory of Shriji Maharaj. In Prakars 41 and 42, the fact of Maharaj's eternal presence in his Brahmaswarup Sadhu has been firmly established:

"Sant hu ne hu te vali Sant re,
Ema Shrimukhe kahe Bhagvanta re,
Sant mānajo māri murti re,
Temā fer nathi eka rati re."

Meaning, "The Sadhu is me and I am the Sadhu says Bhagwan Shri Hari himself. Believe the Sadhu to be my *murti.* This is beyond all doubts" (Prakaran 41).

"Kahu bahu prakāre kalyāna re,
Ati aganit apramān re;
Pana sahuthi saras Santmā re.
Rākhyu Vālame eni vātmā re."

Meaning, "There are many paths leading to *kalyan*, but the Lord describes that the best is the path shown by the (Brahmaswarup) Sadhu" (Prakaran 42).

These works of Sadguru Nishkulanand Swami clearly show that he had realized the true form of the God-realized Sadhu and so is able to teach us to indentity the Brahmaswarup Sadhu. In the Chosath Padi he describes in detail the virtues of a true sadhu and a pseudo-sadhu, teaching us how to distinguish between them. Shriji Maharaj used to say that, "If Nishkulanand Swami had been taught Sanskrit he would have surpassed all in convincing people about my supreme nature."

Shri Harililamrut

Shri Harililamrut is a great landmark in Gujarati literature. It is rich with historical facts about the Sampradaya. This text was written by the great Gujarati poet Dalpatram, but its authorship was given to Acharya Shri Viharilalji Maharaj. The composition comprises many different metres and the *chitra-prabandh* style popular at the time. The different metres, other literary embellishments, pleasing lyricism and clear messages entice one to repeatedly listen to the verses and contemplate on them. The verses composed in *upjati* metre are especially full of inspiring guidance to help uplift our lives in every aspect. Besides the life of Maharaj, there are also stories about eminent devotees. Acharyashri has clearly described the supreme glory of Shriji

Maharaj, reflecting his deep devotion towards Maharaj. This book has been published in two volumes by the Vartal diocese.

Besides these great shastras of the Swaminarayan Sampradaya, the detailed biographies of Aksharbrahman Gunatitanand Swami, Brahmaswarup Pragji Bhakta, Brahmaswarup Shastriji Maharaj and Brahmaswarup Yogiji Maharaj should also be read and studied as they give inspiration for all seeking to progress on the spiritual path. They also give an insight into the history and philosophy of the Akshar Purushottam Swaminarayan Sanstha. Shri Harshadbhai Dave, a great devotee and eminent authority on Swaminarayan history, traditions and philosophy, and other authors have meticulously prepared these books based on authentic sources.

13. Dhyan (Meditation)

Acharya Hiranyagarbha in his Yogashastra and Maharshi Patanjali in Ashtang Yoga have described dhyan, or meditation, as the seventh important step of yoga. Dhyan is defined as concentrating on the *murti* of God. To withdraw all the senses from the objects of worldly pleasure and focus them on and remember God is also called dhyan. But in Ashtanga Yoga, the next stage after *dhyan* is samadhi. Therefore, in order, to attain samadhi state one has to master all the preceding six steps of yoga.

Yama, niyam, asan, pranayam, *pratyahar, dharna,* dhyan and samadhi are the eight important steps of Ashtang Yoga.

Yama means to cultivate the five qualities of non-violence, truth, non-stealing, celibacy and non-possession.

Niyam demands purity of mind and body, contentment, austerities, self-analysis and worship of God.

Asan means to maintain a posture at one place for an extensive period of time. There are 84 different *asans* postures described in the Yoga Shastra.

Pranayam is to control the *purak* (inhalation), *kumbhak* (retention) and *rechak* (exhalation) of one's breath.

Pratyahar means to withdraw all one's senses from their objects of worldly pleasure and channel their focus onto the form of God.

Dharna is to steady one's *chitta* (mind) on God.

Dhyan is to keep one's *chitta* totally and continuously focused on the *murti* of God.

Samadhi is to attain realization of the *murti* of God.

However, these methods of attaining dhyan through Ashtanga Yoga are very difficult.

Our scriptures speak highly of dhyan. One can earn greater merits through dhyan than one may get by performing one thousand Ashvamegh Yagnas, one hundred Rajsuya Yagnas and one thousand Pundarik Yagnas. By performing *yagnas* devotees attain *swarg* whereas through dhyan one experiences the proximity of God.

While sitting for dhyan, one should sit in a clean place facing north or east in the

swastik posture, with both hands on one's lap, eyes towards the tip of the nose and with a tranquil mind focus on one's *atma*. He must believe one's *atma* to be above three bodies, three states and three attributes, and identify one's *atma* with Akshar, the abode of supreme God. Before the infinite greatness of Akshar even the millions of macrocosms, each encircled by eight spheres, appear like mere atoms. With such understanding one should concentrate on Paramatma (Vachanamrut, Loya 12).

In Vachanamrut, Gadhada III 31 Shriji Maharaj emphasizes the necessity of meditating on the manifest form of God. The person who meditates realizes that there is not "the slightest difference between the manifest form of God and the form in his abode…. In fact, both are one…. When one meditates on that manifest form outwardly, in front of the eyes, there is not the slightest difference between that form and this form…. Thus, the same form that is in Akshardham – which is *gunatit* – is manifest. There is no difference between the two. Just as the form in the abode is gunatit, the human form is also *gunatit*."

In Vachanamrut, Gadhada I 21 Shriji Maharaj says, "That Akshar has two forms. One, which is formless and pure *chaitanya*, is known as Chidakash or Brahmamahol. In its other form, that Akshar remains in the service of Purushottam Narayan."

Shriji Maharaj eternally dwells in Akshar and in Vachanamrut, Gadhada I 41 Maharaj says, "He does not manifest in Prakruti-Purush [and others] to the extent he manifests in Akshar…."

The manifest form of Aksharbrahman is the God-realized Sadhu and he sustains Ekantik Dharma on this earth. Shriji Maharaj eternally dwells on this earth through such a Brahmaswarup Sadhu to give spiritual aspirants the bliss of his divine *murti*, help them to attain the *brahmarup* state and achieve liberation.

A heated iron rod which has become red hot loses its original black colour and coolness, since all its atoms contain heat. So, although it remains an iron rod, it has been transformed into heat or fire. In the same manner, Shriji Maharaj dwells from head to toe in the God-realized Sadhu (Vachanamrut, Gadhada I 27)). To meditate upon such a sadhu, our guru, is to meditate upon Shriji Maharaj himself. "*Dhyanamulam gurormurtihi."* – "The root of meditation is the guru." We are attached to the physical world due to darkness in the form of our ignorance. This darkness is removed by the Gunatit Sadhu, who is the object of our meditation. Therefore, such a guru, who is the divine abode of Shriji Maharaj and dwells among us in the human form, is worthy of all our sincere love, devotion and worship in the way the divine *murti* of Shriji Maharaj. In Vachanamrut, Gadhada I 5, Shriji Maharaj has said that we should meditate upon God and his ideal devotee together.

In the Shikshapatri Shriji Maharaj instructs us not to meditate on one who is a *brahmavetta* – knower of Brahman (Shlok 115). Since, *"Pashchādudbhutabodhashcha dhyāne naivopakārakāhā."* – there is no benefit in meditating upon one who was initially ignorant and has then attained enlightenment.

"Naisargiko na vai bodhasteshāmapyanyato yataha,
Tasmāttadamalam Brahma nisargādeva bodhavat."

According to this verse written by Shaunak Muni and quoted by Shatanand Muni in

his commentary on Shikshapatri, there is nothing improper in offering worship the to God together with his ideal Devotee. There is the divine presence of Shriji Maharaj in Prakriti-Purush, Pradhan-Purush and subsequent entities in the line of the cosmic evolution, but our shastras do not permit meditation on these forms. However, those forms in which there is God's special presence can be meditated upon, since they are regarded as forms of God. Sadguru Gopalanand Swami has described four types of dhyan or meditation :

1. *Svānga Dhyan* Meditation on details of different body features of God.
2. *Upānga Dhyan* Meditation on God along with his body features.
3. *Sapārshad Dhyan* Meditation on God along with his choicest devotee.
4. *Salil Dhyan* Mediation on the divine exploits of God.

By *sapārshad* dhyan he refers to the worship of God along with his choicest devotee.

14. Mansi Puja

In the Shikshapatri, Shriji Maharaj has instructed his devotees 'to offer *mansi* puja to God by mentally offering flowers, sandalwood paste and items to him.'

One may question: What exactly is *mansi* puja, or mental worship? Just as we physically perform *pujan* of and serve the *murti* of Shriji Maharaj by using flowers, fruits and other items, in the same way we should offer *pujan* and service mentally as though he is physically present before us. This is called *mansi* puja, or mental worship.

While explaining the importance of mental worship, Shriji Maharaj says in Vachanamrut, Sarangpur 3, "If a person lovingly performs puja of God, with hair-raising sentiments and an emotion-filled voice, then regardless of whether he performs puja physically or performs *mansi* puja, both are superior. Conversely, if he performs puja mechanically – without feeling love or excitement, and without showing emotion in his voice – then regardless of whether he performs puja of God physically or performs *mansi* puja of God, both are inferior."

While performing *mansi* puja one must identify oneself with Aksharbrahman, believe that one is *akshar*, *brahman* and so beyond the three bodies, three attributes and three states.

Mansi puja should be performed five times a day:

1. At the time of *mangala* or *shangar arti*. The *murti* of Shriji Maharaj should be visualized as being offered toothbrush, bathed, fresh clothes and then adorned with sandalwood paste. *Arti* is performed, together with incense sticks and lighted wicks, and then *thal* is offered. One should behold the *murti* of Shriji Maharaj while contemplating on the routine of Shriji Maharaj and visualize that one is offering sincere devotion and service to him. Throughout the worship one must sincerely try to feel the presence of Maharaj in one's heart.
2. The second *mansi* puja is performed before noon. Visualize oneself offering Shriji

Maharaj fresh clothes and inviting him to take lunch. He is seated on a special *asan* and lovingly served the richest delicacies. He is urged again and again to accept our offerings. After eating, Maharaj is offered water and *mukhvas*. Then he requested to rest while we must massage his legs.

3. The third *mansi* puja is performed in the afternoon at around 4.00 p.m. It is the time when our Lord is awakened from afternoon rest. Maharaj is helped to freshen up and then offered drinking water, fresh fruits and snacks. Then visualize that Maharaj has gone to bathe along with sadhus and devotees and is bestowing upon everyone divine bliss.
4. The fourth *mansi* puja is offered at dusk. One should imagine that Shriji Maharaj is seated in Akshardham discoursing to the *muktas*. Then devotionally perform the evening *arti* and *pujan* of Maharaj. Thereafter Maharaj is served the evening meal of milk, *puri*, spiced vegetables, pickles, etc.
5. The fifth and final *mansi* puja of the day is performed at bedtime. Imagine oneself offering cool drinking water to Maharaj before he retires to bed. He is then visualized as lying down on a comfortable bed with mattress, quilt and pillows to to rest for the night.

The content of one's *mansi* puja is varied according to the seasons. Maharaj should be offered food, dress and other things suitable for the season. In all the three seasons, summer, monsoon and winter, one should worship Maharaj with deep devotion. This will increase one's affection towards Maharaj and help one to progress spiritually.

In Vachanamrut, Vartal 5, Shriji Maharaj has stated, "Just as one performs the *mansi* puja of God, if one also performs the *mansi* puja of the ideal Bhakta along with God, by offering him the *prasad* of God… then by performing with extreme affection such similar service of God and the Sadhu who possesses the highest qualities, even if he is a devotee of the lowest type and was destined to become a devotee of the highest type after two lives, or after four lives, or after ten lives, or after a hundred lives, he will become a devotee of the highest calibre in this very life. Such are the fruits of the similar service of God and God's Bhakta."

On the basis of this Vachanamrut, to offer *mansi* puja to Maharaj together with his ideal devotees – Gunatitanand Swami, Bhagatji Maharaj, Shastriji Maharaj, Yogiji Maharaj and Pramukh Swami Maharaj – is sanctioned in the shastras.

15. Janmangal Stotram

This list of 108 different names of Shriji Maharaj has been composed by Shatanand Muni. It is composed in the famous *anushtup* metre of Sanskrit prosody. It is dedicated to 'Dharmanandan Shri Hari' – the son of Dharma. Its inspirer is 'Dharmik' – Shri Hari himself. Its source of strength is 'Bruhadvratdhar' – the observer of absolute celibacy, Shri Hari himself. The subject of this composition is 'Bhaktinandan' – the son of Bhakti, Shri Hari. Repaetedly reciting these verses help devotees to realize all the four goals of

life: dharma, *artha*, *kama* and *moksha*. Brahmaswarup Shastriji Maharaj and Brahmaswarup Yogiji Maharaj prescribed the chanting of Janmangal Namavali for the accomplishment of any task. Today, Pramukh Swami Maharaj chants the Janmangal Namavali at the end of his daily puja for the happiness and spiritual progress of sadhus and devotees and for peace in the world. On Swamishri's instructions the Janmangal Namavali is chanted by hundreds of thousands of devotees throughout the world.

In this composition, names one to nine deal with the divine form of Shri Hari; 10 to 16 describe the divine exploits of Shri Hari while he was with Dharma and Bhakti; 17 to 42 remind us of Shriji Maharaj's sojourns in the forests; and 43 to 103 narrate all the divine and liberating actions of Shriji Maharaj performed during his physical presence in Satsang for 28 years, 5 months and 27 days.

Method of Chanting

Sit cross-legged on the floor and meditate upon Bhagwan Swaminarayan who is seated on a divine throne in Akshardham. His divine form has been worshipped by Aksharbrahman Gunatitanand Swami and countless *muktas* of Akshardham. Chant each name while remembering the divine form of Bhagwan Swaminarayan. When chanted in a group, one member chants the names and the rest follow by chanting *namaha*.

Before one begins to recite the 108 names of God, one should meditate on the form of God with these words:

Varnivesharamaniyadarshanam
mand-hās-ruchirānanāmbujam;
Pujitam suranarottamairmudā,
dharmanandanamaham vichintaye.

"He whose very glimpse is more luminous than that of the head of the Naishtik Varnis; whose face gleams with the divine disarming smile, is worshipped by the greatest of deities and human beings; O Illustrious Son of Dharma and Bhakti! O Shri Hari! I am offering my prayers to you." Then the 108 names of God are recited

Meaning of Names

Each name refers to Bhagwan Swaminarayan's virtues and some also to his physical attributes. The name, 'Shri Krishnāya' was given by Markandey Muni to Bhagwan Swaminarayan after his birth. 'Shri' means one who is full of infinite redemptory qualities and 'Krishna' means one who has a dark, attractive complexion (Ghanshyam had a dak complexion and a beautiful face). 'Krishna' also means one who attracts the mind of others.

Another name is 'Shri Vāsudevāya', where 'Vāsu' means *atma* and 'dev' means Paramatma or Parabrahman who is the controller or ruler. So, Bhagwan Swaminarayan, adorned with infinite virtues, is the ruler of *atma*.

In the name 'Nar-nārāyanāya', 'Nar' refers to one who is a part of Akshar and 'Nārāyan' refers to Paramatma (God). So the name means that the supreme God is with his ideal devotee.

The following is the English transliteration of all 108 names, together with their

meanings.

Shri: One who has infinite virtues.

Namaha: I bow down to.

1. *Om Shri Krishnāya Namaha.*
   I bow down to: One who attracts the mind of others
2. *Om Shri Vāsudevāya Namaha.*
   One who is 'Vāsudev' – Supreme God.
3. *Om Shri Nar-Nārāyanāya Namaha.*
   One who is 'Narayan' – Supreme God – and is with 'Nar' – his ideal devotee.
4. *Om Shri Prabhave Namaha.*
   One who is the highest authority and power, and owner of everything.
5. *Om Shri Bhakti-Dharmātmajāya Namaha.*
   One who has incarnated as the son of Bhakti and Dharma.
6. *Om Shri Ajanmane Namaha.*
   One who is not subject to birth due to karmas.
7. *Om Shri Krishnāya Namaha.*
   One who has a dark, attractive complexion.
8. *Om Shri Nārāyanāya Namaha.*
   One whom Ramanand Swami named 'Narayan Muni' – meaning, the refuge for his devotees and support of everything.
9. *Om Shri Haraye Namaha.*
   One who controls Brahmā and all other deities and destroys the miseries of his devotees who remember him.
10. *Om Shri Harikrishnāya Namaha.*
    One who is 'Hari', meaning one who captivates the mind, and 'Krishna', meaning one who destroys the demons or the enemies of his devotees.
11. *Om Shri Ghanshyamāya Namaha.*
    One who has a complexion like a dark cloud.
12. *Om Shri Dhārmikāya Namaha.*
    One who observed dharma from childhood and is therefore the son of Dharma (Dharmadev).
13. *Om Shri Bhaktinandanāya Namaha.*
    One who is the giver of bliss to Bhakti as her son.
14. *Om Shri Bruhadvratadharāya Namaha.*
    One who has taken up and observes the great vow of brahmacharya.
15. *Om Shri Shuddhāya Namaha.*
    One who is himself the incarnation of purity and is purifier of his devotees.
16. *Om Shri Radha-Krishneshtadevatāya Namaha.*
    One to whom Radha and Krishna are dear.
17. *Om Shri Marutsutpriyāya Namaha.*
    One who is the beloved of Hanumanji, son of the wind-god.
18. *Om Shri Kālibhairavādyatibhishanāya Namaha.*
    One who is serene, yet appears fierce to those like Kalibhairav, etc. who

attempt to kill him.

19. *Om Shri Jitendriyāya Namaha.*
    One who has complete control over his senses and helps others to attain such control.
20. *Om Shri Jitāhārāya Namaha.*
    One who has complete control over his sense of taste and helps others to attain such control.
21. *Om Shri Tivravairāgyāya Namaha.*
    One who possesses highest vairagya (detachment).
22. *Om Shri Āstikāya Namaha.*
    One who inspires faith in God.
23. *Om Shri Yogeshvarāya Namaha.*
    One who is the Lord of the yogis, their sole aim and giver of (their) desired fruits.
24. *Om Shri Yogakalāpravruttaye Namaha.*
    One who grants his devotees the perfection in yoga, without their having to undergo rigorous training.
25. *Om Shri Atidhairyavate Namaha.*
    One whose mind never gets defiled. One who is extremely patient and undisturbed by outer influences.
26. *Om Shri Gnānine Namaha.*
    One who has personal experience of and transmits the knowledge of jiva, ishwar, maya, Brahma and Parabrahma. One who perceives true spiritual knowledge.
27. *Om Shri Paramhansāya Namaha.*
    One who is the greatest among the paramhansas.
28. *Om Shri Tirthkrute Namaha.*
    One who makes places of pilgrimage.
29. *Om Shri Tairthikārchitāya Namaha.*
    One who is worshipped by the sadhus residing in the pilgrim places.
30. *Om Shri Kshamānidhaye Namaha.*
    One who is an ocean of compassion, mercy and forgiveness.
31. *Om Shri Sadonnidrāya Namaha.*
    One who is eternally awake.
32. *Om Shri Dhyānnishthāya Namaha.*
    One who is continuously engrossed in meditation on his own divine form.
33. *Om Shri Tapahpriyāya Namaha.*
    One who is fond of performing austerities and inspires others to perform them also.
34. *Om Shri Siddheshvarāya Namaha.*
    One who is worshipped as God even by those who are accomplished in yoga, austerities and spiritual wisdom.
35. *Om Shri Svatantrāya Namaha.*

One who is truly independent of all.

36. *Om Shri Brahmavidyā-pravartakāya Namaha.*
    One who spreads Brahmavidya (divine knowledge) to all.
37. *Om Shri Pāshandochhedanapatave Namaha.*
    One who intelligently defeats those who behave immorally and falsely interpret the Vedas.
38. *Om Shri Svaswarupāchalsthitaye Namaha.*
    One who is steadfast in his own form.
39. *Om Shri Prashāntmurtaye Namaha.*
    One who is totally calm and whose mere darshan brings peace to the devotees.
40. *Om Shri Nirdoshāya Namaha.*
    One who is free of all defects and faults, such as, ego, hypocrisy, greed, anger, etc.
41. *Om Shri Asuragurvādi-mohanāya Namaha.*
    One whose divine acts captivate even evil gurus.
42. *Om Shri Atikārunyanayanāya Namaha.*
    One whose eyes overflow with compassion.
43. *Om Shri Uddhavādhva-pravartakāya Namaha.*
    One who spreads the teachings of the Uddhav Sampradaya founded by Ramanand Swami.
44. *Om Shri Mahāvratāya Namaha.*
    One who perfectly upholds the five great vows of nishkam (non-lust), nirlobh (non-greed), nisswad (non-taste), nissneh (detachment) and nirman (humility), and who performs severe austerities.
45. *Om Shri Sādhushilāya Namaha.*
    One whose behaviour perfectly reflects the character of a God-realized Sadhu.
46. *Om Shri Sādhuvipra-prapujakāya Namaha.*
    One who honours sadhus and Brahmins and inspires others to do the same.
47. *Om Shri Ahimsayagna-prastotre Namaha.*
    One who established the tradition of yagnas free of animal sacrifices.
48. *Om Shri Sākārabrahma-varnanāya Namaha.*
    One who spreads the understanding that Brahma and Parabrahma both have divine human forms.
49. *Om Shri Swāminārāyanāya Namaha.*
    One who is 'Narayan' – the supreme God – and is always with 'Swami' – Aksharbrahma Gunatitanand Swami.
50. *Om Shri Swāmine Namaha.*
    One who is all-powerful and the Lord of all.
51. *Om Shri Kāladoshanivārakāya Namaha.*
    One who destroys the bad effects of adverse time.
52. *Om Shri Satshāstravyasanāya Namaha.*
    One who is addicted to reciting and listening to the shastras.
53. *Om Shri Sadyasamādhi-sthitikārakāya Namaha.*

One who instantly grants the state of samadhi to his devotees, without their having to perfect the preceding seven stages of yoga.

54. *Om Shri Krishnārchā-sthāpanakarāya Namaha.*
One who consecrates the murtis of God in mandirs.

55. *Om Shri Kauladvishe Namaha.*
One who refutes with logical reasoning the Kaul cults, which preach unrighteous and adulterous behaviour.

56. *Om Shri Kalitārakāya Namaha.*
One who protects his devotees along with their families from the influence of Kali (the dark age).

57. *Om Shri Prakāsharupāya Namaha.*
One who is eternally radiant and resides with his divine form in Akshardham.

58. *Om Shri Nirdambhāya Namaha.*
One who is totally free from pretence and hypocrisy.

59. *Om Shri Sarvajivahitāvahāya Namaha.*
One who does good of all beings.

60. *Om Shri Bhaktisamposhakāya Namaha.*
One who has enriched and promoted the practice of bhakti (nine-fold devotion) to God.

61. *Om Shri Vāgmine Namaha.*
One who lovingly speaks the truths taught by the Vedas.

62. *Om Shri Chaturvarga-falapradāya Namaha.*
One who bestows the fruits of the four endeavours: dharma, *artha* (wealth), *kama* (desires) and *moksha* (liberation).

63. *Om Shri Nirmatsarāya Namaha.*
One who is not envious of the progress of others, but rejoices in their success.

64. *Om Shri Bhaktavarmane Namaha.*
One who is surrounded by a legion of devotees, whom he protects.

65. *Om Shri Buddhidātre Namaha.*
One who bestows spiritual intellect to help devotees realize his true form.

66. *Om Shri Atipāvanāya Namaha.*
One who is absolutely pure and purifies others.

67. *Om Shri Abuddhihrute Namaha.*
One who destroys ignorance.

68. *Om Shri Brahmadhām-darshakāya Namaha.*
One who reveals his abode – Brahmadham (Akshardham) – to all his devotees.

69. *Om Shri Aparājitāya Namaha.*
One who cannot be defeated by anyone but is himself won over by the selfless love of his devotees.

70. *Om Shri Āsamudrānta-satkirtaye Namaha.*
One whose redemptive fame has spread to all the ocean shores.

71. *Om Shri Shritasansruti-mochanāya Namaha.*
One who compassionately redeems his devotees from the cycle of births and

deaths.

72. *Om Shri Udārāya Namaha.*
    One who is extremely generous.
73. *Om Shri Sahajānandāya Namaha.*
    One who is naturally full of joy and bliss and gives such joy and bliss to his devotees.
74. *Om Shri Sādhvidharma-pravartakāya Namaha.*
    One who promotes righteous living among his women disciples.
75. *Om Shri Kandarpadarpa-dalanāya Namaha.*
    One who crushed to pieces the ego of Kamdev – the god of lust.
76. *Om Shri Vaishnavakratu-kārakāya Namaha.*
    One who established the practice of yagnas free from killing and offering animals, as per the true Vaishnav tradition.
77. *Om Shri Panchāyatana-sanmānāya Namaha.*
    One who directs his devotees to honour the five deities – Vishnu, Shiv, Ganapati, Parvati and Surya.
78. *Om Shri Naishthikavrata-poshakāya Namaha.*
    One who practices absolute brahmacharya and inspires others to do so also.
79. *Om Shri Pragalbhāya Namaha.*
    One who is ever enthusiastic and always ready to debate with great scholars.
80. *Om Shri Nispruhāya Namaha.*
    One who is detached from all desires of material enjoyment.
81. *Om Shri Satyapratignāya Namaha.*
    One who always keeps his promises.
82. *Om Shri Bhaktavatsalāya Namaha.*
    One who has infinite love for all his followers.
83. *Om Shri Aroshanāya Namaha.*
    One who is free of anger.
84. *Om Shri Dirghadarshine Namaha.*
    One who has unparalleled foresight and vision.
85. *Om Shri Shadurmi-vijayakshamāya Namaha.*
    One who has conquered the six physical and emotional sensations of thirst, hunger, grief, infatuation, old age and death.
86. *Om Shri Nirahankrutaye Namaha.*
    One who is egoless and dissolves the ego of others.
87. *Om Shri Adrohāya Namaha.*
    One who has no hatred nor maligns anyone, i.e. he is a friend of all.
88. *Om Shri Rujave Namaha.*
    One who is soft-natured (i.e. is compassionate, loving, etc.).
89. *Om Shri Sarvopakārakāya Namaha.*
    One who obliges all without expecting anything in return.
90. *Om Shri Niyāmakāya Namaha.*
    One who controls everything.

91. *Om Shri Upashamasthitaye Namaha.*
    One who has attained complete peace and tranquility by having control over his senses.
92. *Om Shri Vinayavate Namaha.*
    One who is naturally humble and polite.
93. *Om Shri Gurave Namaha.*
    One who is the guru of Brahmā and all other gods to whom he taught the Vedas, thus destroying everyone's ignorance.
94. *Om Shri Ajātvairine Namaha.*
    One who has no enemies.
95. *Om Shri Nirlobhāya Namaha.*
    One who has no greed or desire to hoard things.
96. *Om Shri Mahāpurushāya Namaha.*
    One who is the greatest among all men and possesses the 32 virtues of the great.
97. *Om Shri Ātmadāya Namaha.*
    One who gives his all, including his Ātmā (Aksharbrahma) to his devotees.
98. *Om Shri Akhanditārsha-maryādāya Namaha.*
    One who never transgresses the moral codes prescribed by the rishis in the shastras and does not allow his followers to transgress them either.
99. *Om Shri Vyāsasiddhānta-bodhakāya Namaha.*
    One who sheds true light on the wisdom and principles taught by Vyas Muni.
100. *Om Shri Manonigraha-yuktignāya Namaha.*
    One who teaches his devotees various ways and means to control the mind.
101. *Om Shri Yamaduta-vimochakāya Namaha.*
    One who saves his devotees from the clutches of the servants of Yama.
102. *Om Shri Purnakāmāya Namaha.*
    One who himself is totally fulfilled and fulfills the desires of his devotees.
103. *Om Shri Satyavādine Namaha.*
    One who always upholds and speaks the truth.
104. *Om Shri Gunagrāhine Namaha.*
    One who always imbibes the virtues of others.
105. *Om Shri Gatasmayāya Namaha.*
    One who is egoless.
106. *Om Shri Sadāchāra-priyatarāya Namaha.*
    One who is immensely fond of pure and righteous living and inspires his followers to live similar lives.
107. *Om Shri Punyashravana-kirtanāya Namaha.*
    One whose name and discourses are purifying by their very utterances.
108. *Om Shri Sarvamangala-sadrupa-nānā-guna-vicheshtitāya Namaha.*
    One whose divine murti, divine virtues and divine exploits spread goodness among all and lead them to final (ultimate) liberation.

16. Jetha Mer

To grant innumerable people a place in Akshardham by his divine contact, Shriji Maharaj continually travelled from village to village and fulfilled their wishes.

Once, Shriji Maharaj visited Madhada and stayed at the home of his beloved devotee, Jetha Mer. Jetha Mer and his wife received Maharaj with great love. They engaged a Brahmin to cook and served Maharaj with rich food.

Jetha Mer and his wife lived in separate rooms of their house. When Shriji Maharaj called them together to find out why they were living in separate rooms, Jetha Mer replied, "We are observing the *chheda vartman* – avoiding physical contact – so we don't sit or sleep in the same room." Shriji Maharaj said, "Your vow ends today." Then he personally guided them and went to sleep.

Jetha Mer turned to his wife and remarked "Look, how lustrous is the divine light radiating from the face of Shriji Maharaj. His divine speech is like nectar and all our senses are drawn towards his luminous figure. It's our great fortune that God has come in person to our house to bless us."

As he was taking like this to his wife, Jetha Mer had a rare vision. He saw Shiva, Brahma, Indra and many other deities serving Shriji Maharaj. He saw Lakshmiji and Parvatiji and other goddesses in the service of Maharaj. They were offering food, water and prayers to Maharaj, and performing *arti* andpujan. He was amazed by this divine vision.

Brahma turned to Jetha Mer and said, "Jetha Mer, you and your wife are lucky. Both of you and your parents have been liberated. For many births you have observed austerities and *brahmacharya* and today you have rewarded for this."

Jetha Mer asked, "O Brahma, tell us in which era did we observe austerities and *brahmacharya*?" Brahma and other deities replied, "You have both been observing *brahmacharya* since Krutayuga. Pleased by this manifest God has graced your house." With these words the deities offered their respects to Maharaj and disappeared.

Jetha Mer had conquered lust, which even great deities like Shiva and Brahma had not been able to do. Therefore, Shri Hari had bestowed his innermost blessings upon Jetha Mer.

We, too, must consider it our great fortune that we have the association of Shriji Maharaj in the form of the *brahmaswarup* sadhu. So, we must observe all the codes of moral conduct and rejoice in the worship of Shriji Maharaj.

17. Krupanand Swami

"I want to realize God in this very birth. I am not interested in the life a householder. The *panchvishays* mean nothing to me in this birth." These were the discussion between two Brahmin spiritual seekers from Kanoj, a place in eastern India.

With a deep desire to realize God, these two Brahmins went to Jagannathpuri. They

offered themselves completely in the service of the Lord. They would sweep the floor, fetch water for the deity, pluck flowers and make garlands, prepare sandalwood paste for worship and serve in many other ways. This had become a routine for them. They hoped that one day God would grant them darshan, and so they continued to serve in the mandir.

Once at Jagannathpuri, a large group of *bawas*, in trying to force Maharaj (who was then travelling in the form of Nilkanth Varni) to serve them, quarelled and fought amongst themselves. Many *bawas* lost their lives. These two Brahmins were greatly pained to see the *bawas* fighting with one another. They decided to leave Jagannathpuri and set out in search of God. They visited many holy places, but failed to experience real peace of mind. On their way to Dwarika, they arrived in Bhuj.

At that time, Maharaj was offering alms to the needy at the residence of a devotee called Bhagwanjibhai. As soon as the Brahmins saw the luminous figure of Maharaj they recalled Nilkanth Varni whom they had seen at Jagannathpuri. They experienced divine bliss in their hearts. Shriji Maharaj turned to them and asked, "Who are you? Where have you come from and where do you wish to go?"

The Brahmins replied, "We have come from Jagannathpuri and we were on our way to Dwarika. But now we don't intend to visit Dwarika as we have experienced infinite bliss in your presence and our pilgrimage to Dwarika has been accomplished here itself. Now we wish to remain in your service, so please grant us *diksha*."

"With what understanding will you stay?" asked Maharaj.

"You are God and all the sixty-eight holy places reside at your lotus feet. We had seen you as Varni in Jagannathpuri, but at that time we were unable to recognize your true form. But now we are convinced that there is no liberation without your grace," they answered.

Shriji Maharaj was pleased and initiated then into the sadhu-fold. One of these two Brahmins was Krupanand Swami.

Krupanand Swami was so deeply attached to Shriji Maharaj that he could not stand even a moment's separation from Maharaj. Whenever he had to separate from Maharaj, blood would ooze from the pores of skin due to the grief of separation.

Seeing his deep devotion to Maharaj, Aksharbrahman Gunatitanand Swami once suggested to him, "Instead of suffering like this, why don't you send a word to Maharaj through Naja Jogia to keep you, too, in his service?"

Krupanand Swami replied, "If I were a non-believer having no faith in the omniscience of Maharaj, I would certainly send a message like that." Such was his faith in Maharaj. He believed that one should consolidate one's love with the knowledge of the glory of God. Mere affection for God without such understanding may lead to hurdles on one's spiritual path.

As one of the eminent sadhus, he always sincerely observed the commands of Shriji Maharaj. He had resolved that if consciously or unconsciously there was any disobedience on his part, he should feel the pain produced by inserting a red-hot iron rod into his throat. He highly valued obedience to Maharaj. He had developed great aversion towards the *panchvishays*. He was completely indifferent to the needs of the

body and no material objects could bind him.

Aksharbrahman Gunatitanand Swami has observed, “We can win other people by offering things they love, but the great like Muktanand Swami, Gopalanand Swami and Krupanand Swami cannot be pleased by any physical object. We can please them only by being humble.”

Gunatitanand Swami had such high regard for Krupanand Swami since he had stayed in the company of and served him for a long time. By singing bhajans, delivering discourses and serving Krupanand Swami, Gunatitanand Swami had pleased him.

Gunatitanand Swami used to say, “In other groups, slackness was overlooked, but not in Krupanand Swami’s group.” Since, Krupanand Swami would personally ensure that everyone sincerely observed their duties. Every week he checked the sadhus’ belongings to ensure that nothing unnecessary was hoarded. Therefore, in his group everyone rigorously followed all the codes laid down by Maharaj.

Once, Krupanand Swami was bitten by a snake. He told the sadhus, “No medicine is needed. Please chant the Swaminarayan *mahamantra*.” The sadhus prayed in this way and the effect of the poison subsided. Such was his faith in Shriji Maharaj.

Krupanand Swami remained in constant communion with Maharaj, through *smruti*, dhyan and *jnan*. He did not have to experience samadhi in order to remain in communion with the luminous figure of Maharaj. Through the association of such great sadhus that we get a glimpse into the heart of Maharaj and understand his teachings.

18. Vachanamrut

Vachanamrut, Gadhada I 22
Singing Without Remembering God Is as Good as Not Singing at All; The Digit ‘1’

[1]

At noon on Posh *sudi* 4, Samvat 1876 [20 December 1819], Shriji Mahārāj was sitting facing east on a large, decorated cot on the veranda outside the east-facing rooms of Dādā Khachar’s *darbar* in Gadhada. He was dressed entirely in white clothes. A tassel of flowers had been inserted in his *pagh*, and bunches of flowers had been placed upon both of his ears. He was also wearing a garland of *guldavadi* flowers around his neck. At that time, while some *paramhansas* were singing devotional songs, other *paramhansas* as well as devotees from various places had gathered before him in an assembly.

Thereupon Shriji Mahārāj said, “Please listen; I wish to tell you something.”

Hearing this, the *paramhansas* stopped singing and prepared themselves to listen.

Shriji Mahārāj then said, “If one does not remember God while singing to the accompaniment of a *mrudang*, sarangi, sarod, *tāl* or other instruments, then that singing is as good as not having been sung at all. Besides, there are many people in this world who sing and play instruments without remembering God; but they do not attain peace of mind. Therefore, whichever activity one performs – whether it be singing devotional

songs, reciting God's holy name, chanting the 'Narayan' *dhunya*, etc. – one should only perform that activity while remembering the form of God.

"If a person specifically attempts to engage himself in worship, he may be able to focus his *vrutti* on God; however, after completing those acts of worship, if he does not maintain his *vrutti* on God while engaged in other activities, then his *vrutti* will not become steadied on the form of God even when he attempts to engage in worship again. Therefore, one should practise maintaining one's *vrutti* on the form of God while walking, eating, drinking – in fact, during all activities. If one does this, one's *vrutti* becomes steadied on God when one engages in worship as well. Moreover, when one's *vrutti* begins to remain on God, it remains so even during other work. If one is complacent, though, one's *vrutti* will not remain on God even when one specifically attempts to engage oneself in worship. Therefore, a devotee of God should vigilantly practise maintaining his *vrutti* on the form of God."

Having said this, Shriji Mahārāj requested, "Now please sing devotional songs."

Explanation

Shriji Maharaj says that while singing bhajans and *dhun* one should remember God. Singing without remembering God may give external joy, but can never bring inner peace. Therefore, by remembering God in all our activities we attain real peace and happiness.

It is not sufficient to think of God only when engaged in worship. We must cultivate a habit of remembering him in all our activities – spiritual and worldly. Actions performed without remembering God result in bondage. If we do not remember God while performing worldly chores, we will not be able to concentrate on him when engaged in prayer or meditation. In fact, without such a habit, even when we sit in meditation thoughts of worldly pleasures and chores will fill our mind and not allow us to enjoy the bliss of God. Therefore, Shriji Maharaj insists that we perform all our duties while remembering the *murti* of God.

One may wonder as to how one can do two things at one time. But, just as a fish is carries out all its activities while remaining in water, we, too, can remain immersed in God and perform all our duties without expecting any reward. Maintaining such awareness is like constantly remembering God. This is not a very easy goal, but with continuous practice and God's grace we can develop the habit of remembering God during all our activities.

Vachanamrut, Gadhada I 54

Upholding Bhāgvat Dharma; The Gateway to Liberation

On Maha *vadi* 11, Samvat 1876 [9 February 1820], Swami Shri Sahajanandji Maharaj was sitting on a cushion with a cylindrical pillow which had been placed on a large, decorated cot on the veranda outside the west-facing rooms in front of the mandir of Shri Vasudev-Narayan in Dada Khachar's *darbar* in Gadhada. He was wearing a white *khes* and had covered himself with an orange *reto* that had a border of interlaced golden and silver threads. He had also tied a *feto* around his head using a

sky-blue, silk cloth that was similarly rich. At that time, an assembly of *munis* as well as devotees from various places had gathered before him.

Thereupon Muktanand Swami asked, "Maharaj, through the dialogue between King Janak and the nine Yogeshwars, the 11th canto of the Shrimad Bhagvat describes the nature of *bhagvat* dharma. How is that *bhagvat* dharma upheld? Also, how can the gateway to liberation be opened?"

Shriji Maharaj replied, "*Bhagvat* dharma is upheld by maintaining profound love towards the *Ekantik Sant* of God, who possesses the attributes of *swadharma*, *Jnan*, *vairagya,* and bhakti coupled with knowledge of God's greatness. Maintaining profound love towards such a *Sant* also opens the gateway to liberation. Thus, Kapildev Bhagwan has said to Devhuti:

2

'If a person maintains profound love towards the *Ekantik Sant* of God just as resolutely as he maintains profound love towards his own relatives, then the gateway to liberation opens for him.'"

Thereafter Shuk Muni asked, "By what characteristic can one I've words a person who would never lapse in his observance of dharma, even under the most difficult circumstances?"

Shriji Maharaj replied, "A person whose nature is such that he is diligent in obeying the injunctions of God, and who would never disobey any injunction, however minor or major, will never regress from observing dharma, irrespective of the circumstances. Therefore, only his dharma remains firm who is resolute in obeying God's injunctions, and only his satsang remains firm."

Explanation

Dharma, *jnan*, *vairagya* and bhakti are the four qualities of Ekantik or Bhagvat Dharma. Such Bhagvat Dharma is forever sustained on earth at the feet of God.

After the return of Yogeshwar Shri Krishna to his abode, by whom was dharma sustained on this earth? Muktanand Swami refers to this dialogue in the Shrimad Bhagvat and asks Maharaj to explain who sustained Bhagvat Dharma. In other words, he asks how Bhagvat Dharma remains eternally manifest on this earth. His second question is about how the gateway of liberation for a *jiva* is opened.

Shriji Maharaj explained that this Bhagvat Dharma is sustained by the Param Ekantik or Brahmanized Sadhu who possesses the virtues of dharma, *jnan*, *vairagya* and bhakti with the firm realization of God's glory. Therefore, it is only through profound association of God or such a sadhu that a *jiva* is able to realize Bhagvat Dharma. There is no other way. To realize this Bhagavat Dharma is to earn ultimate liberation. It is this humble and serene *ekantik* sadhu who holds the key to ultimate liberation.

The great scholar Dinanath Bhatt who knew the entire Shrimad Bhagavat by heart was once asked by Shriji Maharaj, "Which *shlok* refers to *moksha*?" He could not answer. Then Shriji Maharaj drew his attention to the verse beginning with

"Prasangamajaram…".

By profound association, Shriji Maharaj means that the attachment one has for oneself and one's relations is developed towards the Param Ekantik Sadhu. Through such attachment the gateway to *moksha* is opened, since such a true sadhu attaches one to God and not to himself.

In his answer to the second question, Shriji Maharaj has says that one who observes the injunctions of God with firm faith and deep devotion would never be deflected from the path of dharma. If one does not rigorously observe the codes of moral conduct, one's dharma is not firm and one's footing in Satsang does not remain firm.

19. Rajabhai

The life of Rajabhai is an ideal illustration of *atmabuddhi* possessed by a true devotee of God.

There is a small village called Khorasa, near Agatrai, in Saurashtra. There lived a landlord called Rajabhai. It was due to the *sanskars* of his previous births that his contact with the *paramhansas* resulted in his development as a beloved devotee of Shriji Maharaj. Like King Janak, this devotee too, led the life of a householder, performing all worldly chores and yet remaining detached. The sole mission of his life was to serve the sadhus, devotees and the Sampradaya. He was a farmer and was not assisted by anybody in his work; even then he would put aside all his worldly obligations and attend the religious ceremonies and festivals at Gadhada or Vartal where he could meet his spiritual master, Shriji Maharaj.

There were very few *satsangis* in his village. A Bania gentleman who had great affection for Rajabhai had joined the Satsang. A group of sadhus used to visit this village twice a year. Rajabhai had taken a vow of providing the rations from his house and feeding the sadhus.

Once, Rajabhai was away. A group of sadhus visited the village and stayed at the common village square. The Bania devotee knew Rajabhai's vow, so he went to Rajabhai's house and asked his wife to provide foodstuff for the sadhus. But Rajabhai's wife had no faith in the Satsang. She lost her temper and remarked, "These idle sadhus have no other occupation; so they are coming to our village, year after year. I am not free. I am tired of grinding flour for them. And besides, don't you have houses of your own that you come here for the rations?" The Bania gentleman felt insulted, but he quietly led the sadhus to his house and served the sadhus with food.

In the evening, on returning home, Rajabhai saw the sadhus. He touched their feet and exchanged good wishes. On his way home, he stopped at the Bania's shop and asked, "I hope you have served the sadhus with foodstuff from my house." The Bania replied, "It was done as was proper and, after all, what is the difference between foodstuff from my house or from your house?" Rajabhai was puzzled. He asked his friend to be precise and clear. So the Bania narrated everything in detail. Rajabhai

became very sad and started introspecting. He became very angry. He resolved, “I toil very hard to fulfil the wishes of my life and these ungrateful people do not show any concern or respect my wishes. If my wife cares nothing for my wishes, there is no sense in sticking to the family. Let me renounce.” He quietly went home.

Rajabhai said to his wife, “You have acted wisely in not providing the sadhus with foodstuff. It isn’t proper for them to visit our house every year. What do they know about our circumstances?” When Rajabhai spoke like this, his wife was emboldened to remark, “I, too, thought exactly like you and turned the sadhus away.”

Slowly and gradually Rajabhai began to wind up his worldly chores. He collected all the gold ornaments, took his precious bulls and sold them for rupees four thousand. Then he took a Brahmin into his confidence and made him write a letter to his wife saying, “Your brother is seriously ill. Please come immediately.” On receiving this letter, Rajabhai’s wife set out to see her ‘ailing’ brother.

Then Rajabhai locked his house and handed the key to one of his neighbours saying, “I am going to Gadhada to renounce. Tell my wife not to wait for me. I leave behind land and enough money to support her.”

With this message for his wife, he set out for Gadhada. He prostrated at the feet of Maharaj and lay his money at his feet and narrated his story. Maharaj then spoke to him, “Do you want to become a sadhu or carry out my commands?” Rajabhai stood there with folded hands and did not utter a word. At that time Parvatbhai was present in the holy assembly. Maharaj said, “Look, Parvatbhai’s son is very young. So you go to his field and till it.” Rajabhai gladly accepted the command and ploughed the field for thirteen years, shedding all the ego of his caste, status or station, to serve a devotee of God.

Many relatives came from Khorasa to persuade Rajabhai to return home. But Rajabhai was determined in his renunciation. He ignored them all.

Meanwhile, Parvatbhai’s son came of age. Shriji Maharaj called Rajabhai to Gadhada, initiated him into the sadhu-fold and called him Aksharanand Swami. Very soon he was made the Mahant of Vartal mandir. Throughout his life he carried out all the wishes of Maharaj and firmly observed all the tenets of the Sampradaya and won the grace of Shriji Maharaj and earned the bliss of God’s abode in this very birth.

If such affection towards the devotees of God is developed, there is no need for penance or renunciation.

20. Swayamprakashanand Swami

“Have you heard of a Jivanmukta who has revealed himself as God in Saurashtra?” Some ascetic pilgrims were talking like this on the verandah of a hermitage.

“No, I haven’t heard of any such a Sampradaya.”

“Well, I have no words to describe him. Innumerable people are put into samadhi by his grace, experience his divine abode and worship him.”

“This is something very extraordinary. But where did you get this information from?”

While these sadhus were deeply engrossed in their talk of him, they experienced a brilliant radiance all around them. Although it was a dark night, they felt as though the sun had risen spreading its rays.

The chief sadhu of the hermitage was resting on his cushioned seat and was startled by this divine light. At first he thought, “Perhaps the forest has been set on fire.” He looked through his window but saw the serene moon spreading its cool soothing light. Then he turned towards the verandah and saw that while the ascetic was talking about that divine being, the light remained. But as soon as he stopped talking, the light disappeared.

The chief sadhu thought, “If mere talk about this person can illumine my hermitage with divine light, the person must possess really great divine powers.”

With this thought he set out for Dwarika in the company of a dozen disciple-sadhus. They arrived at Loj and pitched their tents on the outskirts of the town. The chief sadhu accompanied by two of his disciples went to the town to collect alms. At that time Shriji Maharaj was offering alms to the needy. The chief sadhu fell into samadhi as soon as he saw the luminous figure of Shriji Maharaj. In his samadhi, he had a vision of Nar-Narayan at Badrikashram, Vasudev-Narayan in Shvetdvip and Radha-Krishna in Golok. Then he beheld Shriji Maharaj seated on the divine throne in Akshardham. He saw that Maharaj was surrounded by innumerable muktas who were offering their prayers to him. This divine vision brought divine bliss in his heart and he surrendered himself completely to Maharaj.

Shriji Maharaj turned to the disciples and asked, “Have you ever seen your Master in such a state of mind?”

“No Maharaj, this has happened for the first time,” replied the disciples.

Then Shriji Maharaj cast a divine glance at the chief sadhu and he woke up from samadhi. Then Maharaj offered him some alms. The sadhu collected the alms and returned to his camp. Then next time he approached Maharaj all alone. With a humble heart he prayed, “You are the Supreme Godhead. Please keep me in your service.” The chief sadhu had five hundred gold mahors with him. As instructed by Shriji Maharaj he gave them all to his disciples and join Shriji Maharaj.

Maharaj initiated him and named him Swayamprakashanand Swami. He was a great ascetic who had reached the lofty heights of asceticism and staunchly observed the moral injunctions prescribed by Shriji Maharaj. In accordance with the wishes of Maharaj, he had travelled widely, inspiring innumerable people to join the Sampradaya. He possessed great spiritual powers and had mastered samadhi. In Vachanamrut Gadhada III-24, Shriji Maharaj has paid rich tributes to Shri Swayamprakashshanand Swami by describing him as a sadhu who has firm faith in the divine supremacy of Maharaj.

21. Dhyan Chintamani

When Premanand Swami, the composer of these eight verses, beginning with *'Vandu Sahajānand rasarup anupam sārane re lol…'* recited them before Shriji Maharaj, he became very happy and remarked, "The devotional songs you sang were very nice. After listening to them I thought in my mind, 'Since this sadhu contemplates upon God's form in this way, let me get up and prostrate before him.' If a person is able to contemplate upon God in his *antahkaran* in this manner,… he would definitely not have to take another birth… he has certainly attained the highest state of enlightenment while alive… has become fulfilled and has nothing more left to do" (Vachanamrut, Gadhada II 48).

All devotees of the Sampradaya recite these verses and the verses of *Lila Chintamani* every night. Shastriji Maharaj used to say, "One who sincerely recites the verses of *Lila Chintamani* and *Dhyan Chintamani* while meditating on the divine form of Maharaj in his heart earns merits equal to reciting all the verses of Bhaktachintamani. The verses of the *Lila Chintamani* are in Chapter 20 of *Kishore Satsang Parichay*.

The verses of *Dhyan Chintamani* are as below.

Pad 1

Vandu Sahajānand rasrup, anupam sārne re lol,
Jene bhajtā chhute fand, kare bhav pārne re lol…1
Samaru pragat rup Sukhdhām, anupam nāmne re lol,
Jene Bhav Brahmādik dev, bhaje taji kāmne re lol…2
Je Hari Aksharbrahma ādhār, pār koi nav lahe re lol,
Jene shesh sahasramukh gāy, Nigam neti kahe re lol…3
Varnavu sundar rup anup, jugal charane nami re lol;
Nakhshikh Premsakhinā Nāth, raho urmā rami re lol…4

Pad 2

Āvo mārā Mohan mithadā lāl, ke joun tāri murti re lol;
Jatan kari rākhu Rasiyā Rāj, visāru nahi urthi re lol…1
Man māru mohyu Mohan lāl, pāghaladini bhātmā re lol;
Āvo orā chhogalā khosu chhel, khāntilā joun khāntmā re lol…2
Vahālā tāru jhalke sundar bhāl, tilak rudā karyā re lol,
Vahālā tārā vām karanmā til, tene mandā haryā re lol…3
Vahālā tāri bhrakuti ne bāne Shyām, kālaj mārā koriyā re lol;
Nene tāre Premsakhi nā Nāth, ke chitt mārā choriyā re lol…4

Pad 3

Vahālā mune vash kidhi Ghanshyām, vā'lap tārā vā'lmā re lol;
Man māru talkhe jovā kāj, tibakadi chhe gālmā re lol…1

Vahālā tāri nāsikā namni Nāth, adharbimb lāl chhe re lol;
Chhelā mārā prān karu kurbān, joyā jevi chāl chhe re lol...2
Vahālā tārā dant dādam nā bij, chaturāi chāvtā re lol,
Vahālā mārā prān haro chho Nāth, mithu mithu gāvtā re lol...3
Vahālā tāre hasave harānu chitt, biju have nav game re lol;
Man māru Premsakhinā Nāth, ke tam kede bhame re lol...4

Pad 4

Rasiyā joi rupāli kot, rudi rekhāvali re lol;
Vahālā māru manadu malvā chahāy, ke jāye chitadu chali re lol...1
Vahalā tāri jamni bhujā ne pās, rudā til chār chhe re lol;
Vahālā tārā kanth vache til ek, anupam sār chhe re lol...2
Vahalā tārā urmā vingun hār, joi nenā thare re lol;
Vahālā te to jāne premi jan, joi nitya dhyān dhare re lol...3
Rasiyā joi tamāru rup, rasik jan gheladā re lol;
Āvo vahālā Premsakhinā Nāth, Sundarvar Chheladā re lol...4

Pad 5

Vahālā tāri bhujā jugal Jagdish, joine jāun vārane re lol;
Karnā latkā kartā lāl, āvone māre bārane re lol...1
Vahālā tāri āngaliyuni rekhā, nakhmani joine re lol;
Vahālā mārā chittmā rākhu chori, kahu nahi koine re lol...2
Vahālā tārā urmā anupam chhāp, jovāne jiva ākalo re lol;
Vahālā māre haide harakh na māy, jānu je hamnā malo re lol...3
Vahālā tāru udar ati rasrup, shital sadā Nāthji re lol;
Āvo orā Premsakhinā prān, malu bhari bāthji re lol...4

Pad 6

Vahalā tāri murti ati rasrup, rasik joine jive re lol;
Vahālā e rasnā chākhanhār, chhāsh te nav pive re lol...1
Vahālā māre sukh sampat tame Shyām, Mohan man bhāvtā re lol;
Āvo māre mandir Jivanprān, hasine bolāvatā re lol...2
Vahālā tāru rup anupam gaur, murti manmā game re lol;
Vahālā tāru joban jovā kāj, ke chitt charane name re lol...3
Āvo mārā rasiya rājiv nen, maram kari boltā re lol;
Āvo vahālā Premsakhinā sen, mandir māre doltā re lol...4

Pad 7

Vahālā tāru rup anupam Nāth, udar shobhā ghani re lol;
Trivali jovu sundar chhel, āvone orā am bhani re lol....1
Vahālā tāri nābhi nautam rup, undi ati gol chhe re lol;
Katilank joine Sahajānand ke, man rangchol chhe re lol...2
Vahālā tāri janghā jugalni shobhā, manmā joi rahu re lol;

Vahālā nit nirkhu pindi ne pāni, koine nav kahu re lol...3
Vahālā tārā charankamalnu dhyān, dharu ati hetmā re lol;
Āvo vahālā Premsakhinā Nāth, rākhu mārā chittmā re lol...4

Pad 8

Vahālā tārā jugal charan rasrup, vakhānu vahālmā re lol;
Vahālā ati komal arun rasāl, chore chitt chālmā re lol...1
Vahālā tāre jamne anguthe til, ke nakhmā chihna chhe re lol;
Vahālā chheli āngalie til ek, jovāne man din chhe re lol...2
Vahālā tārā nakhni aruntā joine, shashikalā kshin chhe re lol;
Vahālā raschor chakor je bhakta, jovā ne pravin chhe re lol...3
Vahālā tāri urdhvarekhāmā chitt, raho kari vāsne re lol;
Māge Premsakhi kar jodi, dejo dān dāsne re lol...4

22. Agna

One who wants to realize God attaches great importance to the *agnas* (commands) of God and his holy Sadhu. Such divine commands contain the essence of God's teachings. Without following the commands of God in letter and spirit, all our efforts to please God and the Sadhu will be rendered meaningless. Such efforts will not bring any results. Sadguru Nishkulanand Swami has said:

Shu thayu japa tapa tirathe, shu thayu vali joga jagane;
Shu thavu guna dahapanthi, jo na rahyo Harine vachane.

(All one's austerities, chanting of mantras, pilgrimages, knowledge, virtues and wisdom are of no use, if one does not lead your life according to the teachings of God.)

Therefore, to follow the commands of God is essential for all seekers of *moksha*. Obedience of God's commands and *upasana* are the two wings of Satsang. Just as if a one is injured or missing a bird cannot fly, if one of the two aspects is absent a person does attain *moksha*.

What is *agna*? Shriji Maharaj has laid down rules of moral conduct for all devotees in the Shikshapatri. Dharmamrut and Nishkam Shuddhi contain special codes of conduct for the sadhus. Thus all the devotees, householders and sadhus, should abide by their respective codes of conduct. Besides this, when the God-realized Sadhu gives us any commands, they must be followed since they bring much benefit. Shriji Maharaj has stated in Shikshapatri: "Those men and women who do not act as per the Shikshapatri are external to the Sampradaya. As devotees of the Sampradaya, we must ask ourselves how to what extent we observe these injunctions. Aksharbrahman Gunatitanand Swami has said: "One who wants to please God eternally should never transgress the commands of God."

We practice satsang, chant mantras, observe austerities and perform many other rites in order to win the favour of God and thereby earn salvation. But the easiest

method of attaining all these spiritual benefits is to obey the commands of God.

Yogiji Maharaj used to narrate the following story: Once, a wedding was to be solemnized. There was only one bride, but two bridegrooms: Ganapatiji and Kartik Swami. Then their mother, Parvatiji, stated, "Whoever goses round the earth first will marry the bride." So, Kartik Swami sat on his divine peacock and set off. But Ganapatiji was very bulky and his vehicle was only a little mouse. He was confused, "How will I be able to travel around the earth?" His mother said to him, "Look, this cow represents the form of the earth. So, by circumambulating the cow you can be said to have gone around the earth." Thus, Ganapatiji circled around the cow and won the right to marry the bride. Thus, he benefitted by following the commands of his mother.

Once, eight Kanbi devotees living in Bhadra received a letter from Shriji Maharaj stating: "On receipt of this letter you should come to Gadhpur." It was harvest time. The crop was ready for harvesting and taken home. Four of them thought, "This, too, is important work and besides we don't know how long we will be with Maharaj. Therefore, after completing our farm work we can conveniently go to Gadhada after two or three days." But the remaining four devotees set out at once for Gadhada leaving their crop to the care of Maharaj. Shriji Maharaj made them stay with him for a fortnight. Maharaj regularly offered them food sanctified by him. After experiencing the divine bliss of listening to the discourses of Maharaj and proximity with him, when they returned to Bhadra, they were shocked to see all the farms ruined. Not a blade of grass was to be seen in any of the farms. They thought, "Our field, too, must have met the same fate." On their arrival, they met the other four devotees, who told them with tears in their eyes, "After your departure, the next day our village was plundered by the gang of Baba Saheb. Their horses ruined the crop in all the fields except yours. Your farms were left untouched. If anyone tried to enter your fields, they got strange shocks. Outside your fields the footprints of Manki the mare are seen. You carried out Maharaj's command, so you had the benefit of meeting Maharaj, who, in turn, protected your crop. We foolishly defied his command and lost both." This story demonstrates the benefits one receives by carrying out God's commands and also about the miserable consequences of not observing the commands.

Bhagatji Maharaj always eagerly carried out the commands of Aksharbrahman Gunatitanand Swami without question. Once Gunatitanand Swami instructed him, "Go and call Mount Girnar." Bhagatji instantly left. Bhagatji Maharaj reasoned, "I will go to Girnar and touch it with my head and shall say that Swami is calling it. If it doesn't obey Swami, it would fall out of the divine grace. At least I will earn Swami grace." Thus by carrying out all the commands of Swami without any doubt, he earned the eternal grace of Swami. Our Upanishads are also replete with examples of obedience, such as, Satyakam Jabali, Aruni, Upamanyu and others. By obeying their master, they attained the wisdom of Brahman. Therefore, obedience is of great importance according to our shastras.

Aksharbrahman Gunatitanand Swami has said, "Worldly desires are overcome in

proportion to the sincerity with which commands are followed. With all my commands I give you the divine figure of Maharaj, but the ignorant fail to realize this truth."

As wished by Gunatitanand Swami, Jaga Bhakta looked after the meadows at Sankhdavadar for 16 days. During this time, by the grace of Swami, he was able to see the celebrations in the Junagadh mandir and hear the discourses. Shriji Maharaj has said in Vachanamrut, Gadhada II 51, "Only one who follows the commands of the *Satpurush* is behaving as the *atma.* Observance of commands and sincere worship are the two wings which carry a *jiva* to the divine abode. No bird can fly with only one wing. In the same way no seeker can earn redemption with just one spiritual means.

The principle injunction is: *"Nijātmānam Brahmarupam, dehatraya vilakshanam; vibhāvya tena kartavyam, bhakithi Krishnasya sarvada."* Meaning, "Believe oneself as *brahmarup*, separate from thethree bodies – *sthul, sukshma* and *karan* state – then in that *brahmarup* state always offer devotion to Parabrahman" (Shikshapatri 116). This is the most important command given to us by Bhagwan Swaminarayan. All our actions must be carried out with the understanding that the God-realized sadhu is our soul. Therefore, those who want to win the favour of God should never disobey even the most minor commands of God. We must cultivate firm faith in the divine injunctions and lead our life accordingly.

23. Upasana

Shriji Maharaj has said, "Nothing can be attained without *upasana*." In Swamini Vato Aksharbrahman Gunatitanand Swami has stated, "If by mistake one lapses in the observance of spiritual injunctions, the fault can be amended by performing penance, but defects in *upasana* cannot be atoned for." Therefore, one should worship in such a way that no obstruction comes in the path of *moksha*. One must do *upasana* of God with full and unwavering faith.

What is to be understood by the word *upasana*? *Upasana* is a compound of *upa* + *asana,* meaning 'to sit near'. Thus, it means to remain in close contact with God and to always experience his proximity.

True *upasana* can only be offered when one attains the state of *brahmarup* or *aksharrup*. In Vachanamrut, Gadhada II 3, Shriji Maharaj explains the way in which *upasana* should be offered, "One should develop oneness with one's *jivatma* and with that Brahman, and worship Parabrahman while maintaining a master-servant relationship with him."

According to these words of Shriji Maharaj, *upasana* is directed to Parabrahman. This means that worship is offered only at the two feet of Parabrahman. However, Aksharbrahman is the ideal example of one who offers such *upasana*. So, only when one becomes aksharrup can one offer *upasana* to Purushottam Narayan in the same way that Aksharbrahman does. Thus, the principle is to become *aksharrup* and offer *upasana* to Purushottam Narayan.

Purushottam Narayan always possesses divine virtues, has a form, is supreme, is omniscient, is the all-doer and manifest. To constantly experience his proximity through such understanding is *upasana*.

Parabrahman Shriji Maharaj possesses innumerable divine attributes which are beyond the reach of *maya;* he is the inexhaustible treasure of all great virtues and happiness, and is totally flawless. He is extremely beautiful and luminous. He is eternally manifest in divine form and his attributes are above *maya*. He is eternally youthful and possesses two arms.

Shriji Maharaj is supreme. He is above *jiva*, *maya*, *akshar muktas* and Aksharbrahman. He is the supreme master of all. Only he is absolutely independent, whereas *jiva*, *ishwar*, *maya*, *akshar muktas* and Aksharbrahman are dependent upon Parabrahman. He is the cause of all causes; he is the controller of all; he is the sustainer of all and his powers are boundless. Shriji Maharaj is Purushottam, the *avatari* of all avatars. It is by his divine will that all the incarnations came to this earth from Virat. His presence is in all the avatars. He possesses the great power of absorbing all up to Aksharbrahman. He is Yogeshwar and possesses all knowledge about Yoga. Purushottam Bhagwan, even while dwelling in his divine Akshardham, by his divine will appears in different forms throughout the infinite *brahmands* and brings divine happiness to innumerable devotees. In Akshardham innumerable *muktas* and Aksharbrahman are in his service.

Shriji Maharaj is omiscient. He is the indweller in all the *jivas*, *ishwars*, *akshar muktas* and Aksharbrahman. Even while remaining in his divine abode, he sees all the actions of all, like one sees a drop of water in one's palm.

Shriji Maharaj is the all-doer. He possesses the powers of *kartum, akartum* and *anyatha kartum*. Without his will even a dry leaf cannot move. He gives the fruits of our deeds. Without his inspiration all living beings, beasts and birds, deities, *maya*, *muktas*, etc. are unable to do anything. By his divine will the innumerable brahmands are created, sustained and dissolved.

The form of Shriji Maharaj is divine and luminous. There is no difference between his divine form dwelling in Akshardham possessing infinite powers, glory and divine qualities and the one that dwells on this earth in the form of a human being. His human form, too, possesses all the divine attributes present in his form that dwells in the divine abode. The form dwelling in Akshardham and the one moving on this earth are identical in all respects. Whatever human qualities are perceived in his human form are like the cover used by a magician to conceal the reality.

Whenever Lord Purushottam Narayan descends on this earth to redeem the souls, he comes with all his divine wealth along with his abode – Akshardham – *parshad* and all his powers. Therefore, "a devotee of God should realize that the form of God along with his Akshardham is present on this earth, and he should also explain this fact to others" (Vachanamrut, Gadhada I 71). Thus, Shriji Maharaj has called upon us to understand him along with Akshar. To become *aksharrup* and worship Purushottam is true *upasana*.

Sadguru Gunatitanand Swami is the manifest form of eternal Aksharbrahman. Just

as there is only one Parabrahman, Aksharbrahman is also one and unique.

Aksharbrahman, too, has a form and possesses divine attributes. Aksharbrahman is truth, consciousness and bliss. It has neither beginning, nor end; it is continuous and eternal. Aksharbrahman is beyond all mundane attributes and possesses all the divine qualities Therefore, it is called *nirgun*.

Aksharbrahman is capable of liberating from *maya* all those who come into his contact. Aksharbrahman activates *maya, jiva* and *ishwar*. He sustains them all. Aksharbrahman is indivisible, indestructible and beyond the influence of *maya*. Aksharbrahman is indivisible (*niransha*), immutable (*nirvikari*) and steadfast (*kutastha*). It is beyond all these three attributes. That's why it is known as *gunatit*.

This one eternal Aksharbrahman has two forms. One of its form is known as the luminous attributeless *chidakash* and is the support of the innumerable *brahmands*. Also, in its form as the divine abode it beholds Purushottam Narayan and the countless *muktas*. This form is infinite. Around its every pore circle infinite *brahmands.* They appear like atoms because of immeasurable size of Akshar. This is the *sagun* form of Akshar.

This very Akshardham in its manifest form attends eternally upon its master Purushottam Narayan. This manifest form of Akshardham is the supreme devotee of God and is an ideal for all seekers who want to worship God and win his grace. Purushottam Narayan dwells to the fullest extent in Akshar and to lesser extents in Prakruti-Purush, *muktas* and others. Aksharbrahman continuously serves his Master, Purushottam Narayan, as his choicest attendant. There is a permanent Master-Servant relationship between Purushottam Narayan and Aksharbrahaman. Aksharbrahman is the *sharir* (body) and Purushottam is the *shariri* (soul).

By association with the manifest form of Aksharbrahman in the form of the Sadhu the *jiva* becomes *brahmarup*. As described in Vachanamrut, Kariyani 1, just as a caterpillar is transformed into a butterfly by coming into contact with a butterfly, in the same manner a *jiva* attains becomes *brahmarup* by profound association with manifest Aksharbrahman and becomes worthy of offering worship to Purushottam. Only then is the state of *nirvikalp nishchay* attained and only then is ultimate *moksha* to Akshardham attained.

The gateway to *moksha* was not closed with the return of Aksharbrahman Gunatitanand Swami to Akshardham. Gunatitanand Swami has said in the Swamini Vato, "I am immortal." He meant that he is always present on this earth in the person of the God-realized Param Ekantik Sadhu. Shriji Maharaj remains manifest in the person of this *brahmaswarup gunatit* Sadhu and helps seekers to attain the state of *brahmarup* and *moksha*.

Shriji Maharaj himself has said that God works through the manifest God-realized Sadhu. 'Such a Sadhu is the form of God.' To seek the communion of such a sadhu is a sure means to attaining *moksha*. By the darshan of such a Sadhu, one should realize that 'I have attained the darshan of manifest God.' Such a sadhu supports and sustains the universe. When such association is attained, then what was to be attained after death is attained while alive. Thus, *moksha* is attained while in this corporeal body.

Serving such a sadhu brings the same merits as serving God. By serving such a *brahmaswarup* Sadhu through thought, word and deed and by carrying out all his commands, a *jiva* become pure and *brahmarup* like and attains *moksha* in this very life.

After incarnating on this earth, Shriji Maharaj forever remains manifest in the person of the *gunatit* Sadhu so that the path to *moksha* remains open. As stated in Vachanamrut, Panchala 7, God never leaves this earth. He was present in the person of Aksharbrahman Gunatitanand Swami. Then he was manifest through Brahmaswarup Bhagatji Maharaj, Brahmaswarup Shastriji Maharaj and Brahmaswarup Yogiji Maharaj. Today, God is manifest through Pragat Brahmaswarup Pramukh Swami Maharaj, Swamishri Narayanswarupdasji. Thus Shriji Maharaj eternally dwells on this earth in the person of the God-realized Sadhu and bestows the divine bliss upon innumerable devotees and grants them *moksha* to his divine abode.

In summary, *upasana* is the firm conviction that Shriji Maharaj is the supreme God and that Gunatitanand Swami is eternal Aksharbrahman. Shriji Maharaj eternally dwells on this earth in the form of Aksharbrahman and grants *moksha* to the *jivas*. Aksharbrahman is the doorway to *moksha*. Today, Pragat Brahmaswarup Pramukh Swami is the doorway to *moksha*.

24. Rambai

There is a place called Kathlal near Mahemdavad in Gujarat. A Brahmin lady lived there. She was the only devotee of Maharaj in the village. Her name was Rambai and she had firm faith in and deep devotion towards Maharaj.

One day, when she was drawing water from a well, Shriji Maharaj and his sadhus arrived there. They were passing through the outskirts of this village. When she learnt about Maharaj's visit, she approached him and prayed, "O Maharaj, please sanctify my house and allow me to serve you. You have come this far and now I can't allow you to travel further without sanctifying my house. Your holy presence in the village will inspire many people to join the Satsang."

Sensing her deep devotion, Shriji Maharaj he said, "I know your feelings are great. But we are in a great hurry to reach Vartal. So, it will not be possible for us to halt today, but we shall certainly come in future. Please happily allow us to proceed."

Hearing this from her Lord, Rambai could not argue further. An ideal devotee should always comply with the wishes of the Lord. Rambai was an ideal devotee. When she learned that Maharaj could not stay, she immediately put down her full waterpot and offered water to everyone with love. Then she turned to Maharaj and requestd, "O Maharaj, please dip your feet into my pot "

Shriji Maharaj said, "What will you do with this water?" Rambai replied, "I will drink a little of this sanctified water and pour the remaining water into the village well. There are no *satsangis* in the village, but who ever consciously or unconsciously drinks water from this village well will become *satsangis* and shall worship you."

Bhagwan Swaminarayan had inspired many such women devotees who would not seek material prosperity or pleasure of the senses, but pray for the happiness of all. This story illustrates such deep devotion of a sincere devotee.

Sura Khachar, Somla Khachar and other devotees who were with Shriji Maharaj were delighted to hear this and said to Rambhai, “It is your great fortune that you understand such glory of Shriji Maharaj and have unshakeable faith.”

Then Shriji Maharaj complied with her wishes and dipped his lotus feet into the waterpot of Rambai and set out on the way to Vartal. Rambai’s joy knew no bounds. She drank some sanctified water from the pot and poured the remaining water into the public well. Even today, the residents of the village who drink water from this well are members of the Sampradaya. Such is the effect of the water sanctified by the lotus feet of Shriji Maharaj.

25. Sura Khachar

Sura Khachar of the village Loya is famous in the Sampradaya as one of the closest and dearest devotees of Shriji Maharaj. He had unfathomable love for Maharaj and had surrendered himself completely to serve the Satsang. He was very bulky and tied his turban in a special manner different to all other Kathi rulers. He had a great sense of humour and would make kings, ascetics and sadhus laugh while, he himself would not smile. Although he was very close to Maharaj, he always respected the sadhus and had deep reverence for them. He was a man of clear conscience and devoid of deceit. He was very simple natured. He faced many trials and tribulations but remained unruffled by them.

Once, Sura Khachar was fast asleep in his house at Loya. At night some thieves entered his house and ran away with his storage chest. But Shriji Maharaj, who had taken the responsibility of the welfare and protection of his sincere devotees, made the chest so heavy by his divine power that the burglars could not carry it farther than the outskirts of the village. As dawn was about to break they thought they would be captured. So they ran away leaving the chest there. The passers-by saw the chest and discovered that it belonged to Sura Khachar. Sura Khachar was an early riser and he had learnt that his chest was missing. But when he learnt that it had been traced, he told his wife, Shantiba, ”Look here, we had already lost our chest. But by the grace of Shriji Maharaj, it has been restored to us. Therefore, let us decide to spend half of the amount in the service of Shriji Maharaj.”

All actions of a true devotee are aimed at winning the blessings of God. Shantiba, too, had great affection for Maharaj. When they checked the contents of the chest they found that not a penny was missing. Shantiba said to Sura Khachar, “Please go and invite Shriji Maharaj to our house. He has protected us and saved us from great calamity.” At that time Shriji Maharaj was in Kariyani at the *darbar* of Vasta Khachar.

Sura Khachar went to Kariyani to request Maharaj to visit his house in Loya. But

Dada Khachar requested Maharaj, “Maharaj, the crop of brinjals in Lakshmi Vadi is very good. I have personally looked after the crop. The brinjals won’t last long. After accepting our meal you can happily go wherever you wish.” After some time, Dada Khachar continued, ”Maharaj! In Loya ghee or milk are scarcely found. Good vegetables are also rare. So, let us go to Gadhada.”

Sura Khachar was greatly disappointed to hear this. But he was very witty. He retorted, “Maharaj! Look Dada Khachar is going astray. Instead of praising you, he has started praising brinjals. Maharaj! You are the protector of the poor. I will be much obliged by your visit to Loya. Please be kind and accept my invitation.” Shriji Maharaj always enjoyed such witty humour. He gave his consent, “Go, we will certainly come to Loya.”

The news of Shriji Maharaj’s proposed visit to Loya spread in the surrounding villages. The next day devotees flocked there bringing brinjals with them. Some sixty *maunds* were collected. Pleased by the devotion of the devotees, Shriji Maharaj himself prepared the brinjal curry using twelve *maunds* of ghee. To see Shriji Maharaj cooking is a rare sight even for the deities! He instructed others to prepare *rotla* and then served people with great love. They considered themselves very lucky to have food prepared and served by Maharaj’s hands. The food was like nectar. These were memories to be cherished for a lifetime.

When everyone had finished eating, Shriji Maharaj turned to Dada Khachar and said, “Dada Khachar, how did you find the brinjals? Which brinjals taste better, from Gadhada or Loya?” Dada Khachar was a great devotee of Maharaj he replied, “Maharaj, wherever your divine feet tread, prosperity follows them.”

Maharaj always bowed to the sincere love of his devotees. He could not disappoint Sura Khachar and Shantiba and stayed at Loya for two months. In such insignificant remote place like Loya Maharaj gave learned discourses and bestowed upon the devotees his divine pleasure and grace. The Vachanamrut discourses narrated at Loya testify to this.

Sura Khachar was a very simple man. He was unable to understand the learned language of the scriptures. But because of his immense love for Maharaj he had deep love for the Sampradaya and sincerely observed all the religious injunctions. He firmly observed the vow of celibacy. None could lead him astray or change his mind.

Once, he accepted the invitation of the King of Jasdan. He was very well received by the Thakor and his stay was made very comfortable. When the royal court retired for the night, he returned to the guesthouse, had dinner and retired to bed. The Thakor of Jasdan was predujiced against Shriji Maharaj. He thought, “This is a good opportunity of defiling Sura Khachar.” At midnight, he sent a well-prompted prostitute to the guesthouse where Sura Khachar was staying. She knocked at the door. Sura Khachar got up and asked, “Who is that?” The woman replied, “It’s me. I am the owner of this house. My son is down with fever so I need some medicine. Please open the door.”

Sura Khachar suspected some foul play, but he opened the door. The woman went up to the cupboard and then started displaying vulgar gestures. Sura Bhakta became

alert. He drew his sword, challenged the woman and rushed out. He mounted his horse and rode away. The dark designs of Thakor Saheb to defile Sura Khachar could not materialize.

When he reached Gadhada, Maharaj turned to the devotees in the assembly and said, “Meet our great celibate. He was trapped in a room with a woman and yet he remained undefiled. He has remained pure.” It is no wonder that Shriji Maharaj always readily complied with the wishes of such great devotees.

26. Fagva (Prayer)

Mahā balvant māyā tamāri, Jene āvariyā nar-nāri,
Evu vardān dijiye āpe, Eha māyā amane na vyāpe.
Vali tamāre vishe Jivan, Nāve manushya buddhi koi dana,
Jeje lilā karo tame Lāl, Tene samju alaukik khyāl...
Satsangi tamārā kahāva, Teno kedi abhāv na āve,
Desh kāl ne kriyāye kari, Kedi tamne na bhuliye Hari.
Kām krodha ne lobh kumati, Moha vyāpine na fare mati,
Tamne bhajāta ādu je pade, Māgiye e amane na nade.
Etalu māgiye chhiye ame, Dejyo dayā kari Hari tame,
Vali na māgiye ame jeha, Tame suni lejyo Hari teha.
Kedi desho mā sansāri sukh, Desho mā Prabhu vās vimukha,
Desho mā Prabhu jagta motāi, Mad matsar irshā kāin.
Desho mā dehasukh sanyoga, Desho mā harijanano viyoga,
Desho mā harijanano abhāv, Desho mā ahamkāri svabhāv.
Desho mā sang nāstikano ray, Meli tamne je karmane gāya,
E ādi nathi māgatā ame, Desho mā dayā karine tame.
Pachhi boliya Shyamsundar, Jāo āpiyo tamne e var.
Māri māyāmā nahi munjhāo, Dehādikmā nahi bandhao.
Māri kriyāmā nahi āve dosh, Mane samajsho sadā adosh,
Em kahyu thai raliyāta, Sahue satya kari māni vāt.

- Bhaktachintamani: Chapter 64

The women devotees offered this prayer at the lotus feet of Shriji Maharaj when he once celebrated Fuldol Festival in Sarangpur. Maharaj was very pleased and he blessed the devotees accordingly. Sadguru Nishkulanand Swami has narrated this incident in a chapter of Bhaktachintamani shastra. The chapter is popularly known as ‘Fagva’ Chapter.

This chapter is sung in satsang assemblies throughout the world every week.

27. Spiritual Talks of Gunatitanand Swami

1. *Swaminarayan Hare Swamie vat kari je: "Nand Rājāe ākhi pruthivinu dhan bhedu karyu ne pachhi chheli vāre emāthi mot thayu. Ne Chitraketu Rājāe karod striyu bhedi kari ne chheli vāre temāthi dukh thayu tyare muki. Te mārgaj evo chhe."*

"King Nand hoarded all the wealth of the world and finally died from attachment to it. King Chitraketu had ten million wives and finally left them when they brought him misery. This path of attachment to wealth and women is like that" (Swamini Vato 1.85).

Most people believe that happiness lies in wealth and women. But Aksharbrahman Gunatitanand Swami, through these two examples, explains us that all earthly pleasures are perishable and result in miseries.

King Nand resolved to gather the entire wealth of the world, but then he worried about where he would keep his treasure. So he propitiated Lord Varaha and received a piece of bone which opened the bottom of the seas where he could hide his treasures. He used his royal authority and made his people part with their money. In order to check whether any money was left with the people, he offered for sale a camel for one paise. A Muslim boy started crying and asked his mother to get him a camel, "Mother, please get me a camel." His mother tried her best to dissuade him, but the boy would not listen to her. The mother went to the graveyard and dug open a tomb, collected money and bought her son a camel. When the king learnt about this, he had all the graves dug open and collected all the money hidden there.

Naradji could not like this abnormal greed of the king. He went to the queen and said, "O queen, the king does not love you so much as he loves his dead wife." The queen replied, "It's not true. He loves me immensely." Naradji tactfully replied, "If it is true, then why does he still preserve the bone of the dead queen?" Thus Naradji instigated the queen and she became inquisitive. She asked, "Where does the king keep the bone?"

Naradji replied, "He always keeps it with him. When he comes to you, you can check it out."

The queen was convinced. In the evening when the king came for his meal, she found that there was a piece of bone in his pocket. It was the same bone which was given to him by Lord Varaha. But the queen was convinced that it was the bone of the deceased queen. She picked it up and threw it into the fire. When it was reduced to ashes, she went to the King and complained, "You don't have as much love for me as you have for the deceased queen."

The king pleaded with her and said, "This is not true. I love you immensely. What is the point remembering the deceased queen?"

Then the queen questioned, "Then why were you preserving her bone? I discovered it and threw it into fire." The king was shocked to hear this. He got up and saw that the bone given by Lord Varaha was destroyed. he had collected the entire wealth of the kingdom, but he was unable to use it. His one thousand sons, too, could not inherit the wealth. In addition, he received a great mental shock and became very miserable.

King Chitraketu had one *crore* wives in his palace and came to grief as a result. He was the king of the Shursen kingdom. In spite of one *crore* wives he had no son. Once, Rishi Angira came to his palace. He was received with great love and became very

happy. He performed a *yagna* and gave a portion of the sanctified food to the most virtuous queen, Krutadyuti. By the grace of the Rishi, the queen gave birth to a male child. Chitraketu and Krutadyuti loved the child immensely. However, the other queens grew jealous. One day when the mother was away, the child was poisoned. The child died and its death caused great pain to the parents.

Thus, grief came to Chitraketu from those very queens whom he loved immensely. He experienced peace only after renouncing them.

Through these two stories Aksharbrahman Gunatitanand Swami teaches that what appears to be the source of happiness to us, ultimately causes unbearable grief. God is the infinite ocean of happiness and bliss; no grief can come from him. Therefore, we must seek pleasure in God and his sadhus and not in mundane pleasures.

2. *Swaminarayan Hare Swamie vat kari je: "Dukh koi mānsho nahi ne je joie te āpanne malyu chhe ne jhājhā rupiyā āpe to Prabhu bhajāy nahi, te sāru āptā nahi."*

"Do not feel miserable, for we have got what we want. If too much wealth is given, one forgets God and does not worship him. Therefore, he does not give it to us" (Swamini Vato 1.129).

Gunatitanand Swami tell us that God gives us what is in our destiny. We get sufficient food and clothing and are guided by sadhus in our worship of God. We should remain contented and should not seek more money. If God gives us more wealth, we will get lost into the worldly pleasures and shall forget God. The following story illustrates this

There was a very wealthy businessman. He was very happy and had nothing to complain about. He had everything for his happiness. A poor man lived in a hut next to his mansion. This man worked hard and earned his daily bread. He was not worried about his next meal. He led his life happily in the worship of God. Their family was happy.

The wife of the wealthy man was puzzled. She wondered that although their neighbours were poor, they were very happy. Once she asked her husband to explain to her the secret of the poor man's happiness. Every time the rich man avoided giving an explanation. But one day the wife insisted upon an explanation. She asked, "We have all the pleasures and yet there is no peace in our life; whereas these hut dwellers are very happy. I don't understand why?"

The rich man replied, "He is happy because he is satisfied with what he gets and does not crave for more money." This explanation did not satisfy the wife. She said, "How can I believe that one can happily live without money?" So, at night, the rich man dropped a bag containing ninety-nine rupees into the hut of the poor man. The poor man saw it lying in his hut in the morning. From that very moment he began to think that if he could add just one rupee he would have one hundred rupees. He started putting aside two paise from his daily earning. After some time he owned one hundred rupees. Then he aimed to collect two hundred rupees. Thus, with this worry, he lost his sleep and lost the happiness which he used to get from the worship of God.

The rich man called his wife and said, "Did you see? What a deadly knock ninety-

nine rupees gave to that poor man? Lust for money takes away peace of mind."

Therefore, Gunatitanand Swami has rightly pointed out that we must remain contented with what we receive. The greater the wealth, the deeper will be our involvement in mundane interests, resulting in unhappiness and turning away from God. Therefore, in order to be happy we must be content with what God gives us and should devote more and more time to the worship of God.

3. *Swaminarayan Hare Swamie vat kari je: "Bhagwān ne motā Sādhune āshre karine vādal jevā dukh āvvānāhoy te pan tali jāy ne sādhan karine kuti kutine mari jāy to pan na tale."*

"By seeking refuge in God and his Sadhu, even intense miseries that are to befall on one are averted. However, even if one exhausts oneself through endeavours, they are still not averted" (Swamini Vato 1.114).

Gunatitanand Swami says that if we have firm faith in God and his sadhu, and if we can cast all our cares onto them, then we can easily overcome all adversities by their grace. The following example demonstrates this.

Once, Aksharbrahman Gunatitanand Swami had gone to a place called Thanagalol. A devotee named Jasa Rajgor lived there. He was rich in devotion, but financially poor. His land wasn't very fertile and so did not yield much crops. When Swami visited him, he served him to the best of his means. Then he prayed to Swami, "Swami! I am facing great hardships. Besides, I am living on the highway so I am regularly visited by sadhus and devotees. But I am sorry that I cannot serve them properly. At times, I find it difficult to meet my own needs of food and clothes. Even the hard labour in the field does not yield much."

When Gunatitanand Swami heard his story of miseries, he was moved by and started thinking about his problems. After thinking for a while, he asked him, "Have you got anything?" The devotee replied, "Yes, Swami, I have some millet with me." Then he lay whatever little millet he had at Swami's feet. Swami said to his companion sadhu, "Carry this millet to Junagadh. There we shall soak it and give a handful to each sadhu." Then again he asked the devotee, "Bhagat, is there any cloth in your house?" Jasa Bhagat brought a piece of cloth. Swami tore a small piece to filter water. Then Swami went on a horse to Jasa Bhagat's farm. He saw the farm and remarked, "This land can produce gold. You should cultivate cotton." Then, as commanded by Swami, Jasa Bhagat borrowed a plough and made nineteen criss-crossing lines in his field and sowed cotton seeds. The yield was fantastic. He cleared all his debts and still had five hundred rupees surplus. He served the sadhus with rich food and became prosperous thereafter.

This was just a common worldly misery. What was unique was Swami's grace and support. Swami poured nectar into the barren land and removed all the sorrows and agonies of the devotee. Many devotees have experienced such blessings.

The Pandavs had to face many difficulties. They were exiled, escaped death in the house of wax, and had to fight great wars. They emerged victorious from all these dangers because they were supported by Shri Krishna. All their problems were solved

by their Lord. However strong we may be or however intelligent we may be, but it is all useless without God's help. Therefore, we too, should seek refuge in God and his holy Sadhu so that our miseries are destroyed and we become happy.

4. *Swaminarayan Hare Swamie vat kari je: "Bhagwān jivanā gunā sāmu jota nathi. Te koi jiva Bhagwānni stuti karine em bole je, 'Hu gunegar chhu,' to tenā gunā Bhagwān māf kare."*

"God does not look at the faults of the *jivas*. If a *jiva* prays to God and says, "I am at fault," then God forgives him of his faults" (Swamini Vato 1.77).

God and his sadhus are full of mercy. They forgive all our faults, allow us to remain in the Satsang and lead us further on the spiritual path of *moksha*.

Shuk Swami's disciple, Sadhu Hariswarupdasji, had insulted Aksharbrahman Gunatitanand Swami in the assembly at Vartal. But Swami was full of mercy and he forgave everything. While he was returning from the mandir after darsan he met Hariswarupdasji. He removed the garland of roses from his neck and with great love presented it to the sadhu who had insulted him.

Yogiji Maharaj was insulted by Narayanprasadji at the Narayan Lake near Mojidad. But when the same Narayanprasad visited Sarangpur, Yogiji Maharaj served him with great love. How gracious and forgiving Yogiji Maharaj was. True sadhus always do good turns even to those who cause pain to them.

If a person full of vices seeks God's refuge in all sincerity, and prays, "O Lord! I am a sinner. Please pardon me," God will certainly pardon him and purify him. Hirabhai Mukhi of Bochasan sought Shastriji Maharaj's shelter. He confessed all his sins and Shastriji Maharaj purified him and liberated him from all his vices and addictions. God is there to pardon the wrongs of men. But man does not become humble and pray for mercy. Gunatitanand Swami has said in his spiritual talks that God always grants mercy to the *jivas*. But human beings are very strange. They would do everything but remember God. Those who do not pray cannot overcome their sorrows.

5. *Swaminarayan Hare Swamie vat kari je: "Rājāne pāni na pāyu, to pan tene sankalp karyo hato tethi gām āpyu, te jiva potānā swabhāv muktā nathi, tem Bhagwān pan potāno swabhāv moksha karvāno, te muktā nathi."*

"The king was not served water, but since he had decided to, he gave away a village. Just as human beings do not change their nature, God, too, does not give up his nature of granting *moksha* to people" (Swamini Vato 1.212).

There was a king. One day he went to the forest to hunt. While chasing his prey he strayed far away and his companions could not keep pace with him. The king became thirsty, but there was no water in sight. He went a little farther and saw a farmer working in the field. The king thought that he would certainly get some water. The king resolved to give a village as reward to the farmer, if he would give him some water. But the farmer thought, "I will not offer water to such a cruel man." So he poured away whatever water he had with him. On approaching the farmer, the king saw that the water had been spilt by the farmer. Even then, as he had decided to give

him a village the king kept his promise. Through this example Gunatitanand Swami explains that people do not change their nature even after seeking the company of God and his holy Sadhu. God, too, does not change his nature of granting *moksha* to the *jivas*. Deviwala Magniram confronted Shriji Maharaj with evil intentions? But Shriji Maharaj resolved to purify him. So, through the goddess, he convinced him of his powers and divinity and transformed him into a devotee. He initiated him into the sadhu-fold and thus granted him *moksha*. This is the grace of God.

28. Dosabhai of Bandhia

"Have you come from Bandhia? How is my devotee Dosabhai? Is he fine?" Shriji Maharaj inquired of the businessmen who had called on him. The merchants replied, "Maharaj. We are neck deep in our affairs, but your devotee Dosabhai is submerged in his affairs upto his tuft of hair. He has no time to worship God. He is so busy that at times he doesn't even have time to bathe in the morning. But, after all, he is your *satsangi*, so it's no wonder that you are praising him. Shriji Maharaj smiled on hearing this. Then he remarked, "Will you join the Satsang if Dosabhai becomes a sadhu?"

The merchants thought that since Dosabhai had just purchased all the jaggery produced in the village and was likely to earn a handsome profit he would certainly not decide to renounce under such circumstances. Thus, the Banias replied, "If Dosabhai renounces, we shall certainly join the Satsang and wear your *kanthi*."

This was the dialogue that took place in Gadhada had between the Jain Banias, who had accompanied a wedding party from Bandhia, and Shriji Maharaj. After they had left, Shriji Maharaj called Bhaguji and said, "Take these saffron clothes. Ride immediately to Bandhia, and give my note to Dosabhai and tell him to don these clothes of a sadhu and come here to Gadhada."

When Bhaguji arrived in Bandhia, Dosabhai was unloading and weighing the carts of jaggery. It was eleven in the morning. He was so busy that he had not even brushed his teeth, and his *datan* stick rested on his ear. When Dosabhai saw Bhaguji, he stopped his work and prostrated before him. With folded hands he asked Bhaguji, "Any command from Maharaj?" Bhaguji handed him the note and said, "Maharaj wants you to wear these clothes of a sadhu and go to Gadhada."

Dosabhai complied with the wishes of Maharaj. He put on the saffron clothes and accompanied Bhaguji to Gadhada. He didn't wait even to send a message to his family, nor did he ask anyone to look after his business. He went directly to Gadhada and offered his respects to Maharaj.

The Banias, before returning to Bandhia after the marriage, called on Maharaj. Then Maharaj pointed at Dosabhai seated amidst the sadhus and asked the Banias, "Do you recognize this man?"

The Banias could not believe their eyes. They were surprised to see Dosabhai in this new attire. They admitted, "O Maharaj! Your Dosabhai is really a great ascetic and a

great devotee. We are so deeply rooted into mundane life that we could not recognize the real Dosabhai, and thought that he, too, was deeply attached to the material world." They prayed to Shriji Maharaj to pardon them and took his leave.

Then Shriji Maharaj gave white clothes to Dosabhai and said, "Take back your old clothes and return home. Serve your mother till she lives. You are a great ascetic even while leading the life of a householder. You are beyond the temptations of the mundane life."

As commanded of Shriji Maharaj, Dosabhai returned home. Dosabhai was a great devotee with firm faith in the supreme glory of Maharaj. He had never, even in thought, transgressed the spiritual injunctions prescribed by Maharaj. He was always ready and eager to carry out Maharaj's orders.

Dosabhai was a Bania and originally belonged to a place called Sardhar. He was a staunch follower of Ramanand Swami. After the demise of Ramanand Swami, he met Shriji Maharaj and was convinced about his divinity.

Then Maharaj inspired him to shift to Bandhia and asked Darbar Mulu Khachar to get him a house and other necessities. Since then Dosabhai had lived in Bandhia.

Dosabhai was such a devout devotee with firm faith in the divine glory of Maharaj. We, too, should resolve to cultivate such faith in the supremacy and divine glory of Maharaj.

29. Mulji and Krushnaji

There is a place called Mankuva in Kutch. It has been sanctified by Shriji Maharaj's frequent visits there. In those days two Brahmins named Mulji and Krushnaji lived there. They were great devotees of Maharaj and farmed for a living.

One day Shriji Maharaj arrived at Mankuva. He sat with a pair of scissors and declared, "If you are true devotees, then come forward I want make you sadhus." Who would be prepared to become a sadhu? One after another everyone gradually left the place.

At that time Mulji and Krushnaji were busy on their farms. When they returned home, the devotees talked to them about Maharaj's offer. They were informed how all the devotees had left the assembly because of Maharaj's tough suggestion. Immediately these two Brahmins went to Maharaj. They fell at his feet and prayed, "O Maharaj! We want to renounce." Maharaj warned them, "You won't get sufficient food; you will be attacked by the *bawas*, you will have to bear the heat and cold and face many calamities. You will suffer difficulties beyond your imagination. Therefore, go and think about this seriously."

They went a little away and thought to themselves, "O Mind! If you don't worship God in this life, you will be sent back as a dog, donkey or other animal. Who will then cover you? Who will then feed you? Who will make your bed and who will look after you during illness? Therefore, if we comply with the wishes of God in this life, there

won't be suffering in future. What do you think, O wavering Mind?"

They resolved firmly, returned to Maharaj and said, "We have resolved to renounce. Our conscience consents." With these words one of them started untying the lace of his coat so the other remarked, "We don't need it any more," and tore the laces. When Shriji Maharaj saw how firm they were in their resolve to renounce, he turned to them and said, "You have become *paramhansas*! It is my wish that you remain as householders. The worldly life shall not affect you or bind you."

They carried out Maharaj's wishes and returned home, but they had lost all interest in the affairs of the world.

Mulji had no doubt about the divinity and supremacy of Maharaj. But Krushnaji wondered how Maharaj could be called God, even though he did believe that he was a great person. He said to Mulji, "Either you are an insincere devotee or he is not God. If he were really God, how could you come back from him?" Mulji took Krushnaji to Gadhada to convince him about the divinity of Maharaj. As soon as he saw Maharaj, he was drawn towards him and was convinced that he really was God. Krushnaji then spoke to Mulji, "Now I am not returning home." As they did not return home for many days, Shriji Maharaj received a letter from their relatives stating, "Both Mulji and Krushnaji are married. There are many problems here. Please be kind and send them back." Shriji Maharaj ordered them to return home, so both of them started homewards.

But, on their way home, they stopped at Vanthali and worked as helpers at a Bania's house. At the end of the year, they came to Maharaj with sixty rupees and prayed, "Please keep us here and make us sadhus." Shriji Maharaj asked them, "Where had you been all these days?" Mulji replied, "Maharaj, "We were at Vanthali." Then Maharaj explained, "Your relatives have come to take you back. You go home with them. If you really want to renounce, go home and bring a letter of consent from your wives."

They left for home as instructed by Maharaj. On their way they tried to persuade their wives to allow them to renounce. But their wives would not listen to them. So at last they cut off their own genitals!

Their wives were greatly disappointed and returned home. Then Mulji and Krushnaji came back to Maharaj. But Maharaj rejected them and turned them away from the Satsang. But they themselves put on the saffron clothes of *paramhansas* and worshipped Maharaj from a distance. Thus they wandered for twelve months in the Satsang.

They once again arrived at Gadhada. When they approached Maharaj, he ordered, "Don't allow them to come to me. Drive them away." So they were driven away. But at night both of them sat on the bank of the River Ghela and started singing bhajans in the *paraj* metre. Maharaj heard their bhajans from Akshar Ordi. He said to Bhaguji, "My cot is drawn by the bhajans of those two fellows. Go and drive them away." So, the *parshads* drove them away up to Hanuman Dhar on the way towards Gundala.

The duo sat there and started singing again. Maharaj heard them and once again complained, "My cot is being pulled by their bhajans." Some half a dozen *parshads*

went to force them away from that spot. Mulji and Krushnji fell at their feet and prayed, “We shall certainly obey Maharaj. Don’t forget, we are from Kutch. We can match even a hundred people like you at a time. We won’t leave this place. Go and ask Maharaj as to what exactly he wants of us? What is his command for us?”

The *parshads* went to Maharaj and narrated everything in detail. Maharaj was just testing them. He ordered, “Go and call them to me.” When the pair stood before Maharaj, he convened a meeting in the Akshar Ordi and said, ”I have treated them harshly. They have been insulted and rejected, but they are firm in their faith.”

So the assembly requested, “Please allow them to be with you.” Then, Shriji Maharaj gave them *bhagvati diksha.* He named Mulji as Ghanshyamanand Swami and sent him to stay in Junagadh. He named Krushnaji as Sarvagnanand Swami and appointed him as Mahant of the Ahmedabad mandir.

Shriji Maharaj blesses those who have such firm faith in and understanding of God’s supreme glory.

30. Mahima (Glory)

Shriji Maharaj is the supreme cause of all the causes and is the *avatari* of all avatars. He is Lord Purna Purushottam Narayan. He is the all-doer, always with a form, divine, luminous, omniscient and always manifest on earth. He is free from all the flaws and mundane attributes, and is full of gracious qualities. In the entire cosmos none can match him in powers, beauty or attributes. He is above Aksharbrahman, *akshar muktas*, *maya*, *ishvars* and *jivas*. He is the supreme Master and indweller of all. He sustains them all and he is the object of their worship. *Maya* or anything related to *maya* cannot touch him. The worship of Shriji Maharaj with such a firm conviction and belief reflects an understanding of the true glory (*mahima*) of Lord Purushottam Narayan.

Aksharbrahman, too, is unique. Sadguru Gunatitanand Swami was the first manifest form of Aksharbrahman. He is the most ideal and supreme devotee of Shriji Maharaj. Aksharbrahman, too, is above *maya*, *ishvars* and *jivas*. He is their cause and sustains them. Aksharbrahman is also free from all flaws. He is an ideal for the spiritual seekers. In order to become worthy to worship Purushottam in Akshardham, one must attain oneness with Aksharbrahman.

The Ekantik Sadhu,* who is the manifest form of Aksharbrahman and is our guru should be realized as *gunatit*. Through him, Maharaj eternally dwells on this earth, bestows divine bliss upon devotees and grants them ultimate salvation. Maharaj resides in him from head to toe. Maharaj is never separate from him. He is divine, serene and free from *maya*. Aspirants who seek his refuge in all sincerity and humility with mind, body and speech, will transcend the three *gunas*, the three states and three bodies and shall *brahmarup*. The glory of the manifest guru should be understood in this way.

We must look upon all devotees who are associated with Shriji Maharaj, Gunatitanand Swami and the manifest guru as being pure like *brahman*. As they are in

communion with God, we should not offend them, nor should we entertain any ill-feelings towards them. The way Uddhavji had recognized the glory of the Gopis, we, too, should realize the glory of God's devotees.

Such glory can be known only by associating with sadhus. One who has such understanding will never develop any ill-will towards a devotee of God. He sees the entire Satsang as divine and readily interacts with all with unity, friendship and fraternity. Such a person will always try to examine his own faults and shall strive to get rid of them. With all these feelings he would act in such a manner that he does not transgress the injunctions laid down by God. He will follow them rigorously and would never go astray from the spiritual path. A devotee possessing such understanding remains always contented and fulfilled and is confident, "I shall be redeemed and shall go to Akshardham." One who worships with such an understanding of God's glory in his heart crosses all impediments in his spiritual journey.

31. Kalyan – Ultimate Liberation

Kalyan, mukti or *moksha,* means liberation. *Moksha* means destruction of *moha* – delusion. Liberation means to become worthy of worshipping Lord Purushottam by attaining with the state of *brahmarup*. This is possible by association and service of the Ekantik Sadhu, who destroys all our ignorance and the bondage caused by our actions over many births. Liberation means attaining Akshardham, the divine abode of Shriji Maharaj.

Shriji Maharaj states in Vachanamrut, Panchala 1, "The happiness of humans exceeds the happiness of animals; and the happiness of a king exceeds that; and the happiness of deities exceeds that; and the happiness of Indra exceeds that; then Bruhaspati's happiness, then Brahmā's, then Vaikunth's. Beyond that, the happiness of Golok is superior, and finally, the bliss of God's Akshardham is far more superior."

Moreover in Vachanamrut, Sarangpur 11, Maharaj says, "The realm of the deities, which, in the Moksha-dharma, are described as being like *narak* compared to the abode of God." The objects and sources of enjoyment in realm of the *devas* are insignificant in comparison to the perpetual divine bliss in Akshardham. Also, attaining the realm of the *devas* does not free one from the cycle of births and deaths, but attainment of Akshardham guarantees liberation from the agonies of births and deaths. They forever remain in the service of God and enjoy his divine bliss.

The shastras describe many types liberation. But *atyantik kalyan* – ultimate liberation – which liberates us from the cycle of births and deaths and which assures us of a place in Akshardham, where we can eternally remain in the service of Purushottam, is difficult to attain.

Ultimate liberation of this kind becomes possible only through the service of the God-realized Sadhu. When one comes into contact with the *brahmaswarup* Sadhu, one becomes convinced about the real form of Lord Purushottam and this knowledge in

turn lifts one above the three *gunas*, three states and three bodies and one becomes *brahmarup* and attains ultimate liberation. One attains ultimate liberation only by cultivating the four great qualities of dharma, *jnan*, *vairagya* and bhakti with atrue understanding of God's glory. Only by association with the God-realized Sadhu are these four virutes, and thus ultimate liberation, attained.

32. Spiritual Verses

Samadukhasukhah svasthaha samloshtāshma-kānchanaha;
Tulya-priyāpriyo dhirastulya nindātma sanstutihi.
Mānāpamānayostulyastulyo mitrāripakshayoho;
Sarvārambha parityāgi gunātitaha sa uchyate.

Equipoised in happiness and misery, who dwells in the Self, to whom dirt, a stone, or gold are alike, to whom the dear and unfriendly are alike, firm, the same in censure and praise. The same in honour and insult, treats friend and foe alike; renouncing all undertakings – he is said to have transcended the *gunas*.

- Bhagavad Gita 14.24-25

Brahmabhutaha prasannātmā na shochati na kānkshati;
Samaha sarveshu bhooteshu madbhaktim labhate parām.

One who has become like Brahman and is serene in the Self, does not grieve or crave for anything; and maintaining an even disposition towards all beings, he attains highest devotion to me.

- Bhagavad Gita 18.54

Nijātmānam brahmaroopam, dehatraya vilakshanam;
Vibhāvya tena kartavyā bhaktihi Krushnashya sarvadā.

Identifying one's self with Brahman, separate from the three bodies, one should always offer devotion to God.

- Shikshapatri 116

Gālidānam tādanam cha krutam kumatibhihi janaihi;
Kshantavyam eva sarveshām chintaniyam hitam cha taihi.

They (sadhus) shall always bear abuses and insults hurled upon them by the wicked and also their beatings. Not only should such evil acts be forgiven but the persecutors should also be blessed for betterment in their life.

- Shikshapatri 201

Āsāmaho charanarenujushāmaham syām,
Vrundāvane kimapi gulmalataushadhinām;
Yā dustyajam svajanamāryapatham cha hitvā,

Bhejurmukundapadavim shrutibhirvimrugyām.

Gopis had boldly left their dear ones and the path of the virtuous to worship the Lord, whom even the Vedas desired to find. Thus, they had left everything to offer devotion to Lord Krishna. I wish, I were an insect or some plant or creeper or even a blade of grass in Vrindavan, the land which has become sacred because those Gopis had trod upon it.

- Shrimad Bhagvat 10-47-61

Yannāmadheya shravanānukirtanādyatprahvanād
yatsmaranādapi kvachit;
Shvādopi sadyaha savanāya kalpate,
katham punaste Bhagavannu darshanāt.
Aho bata shvapachoto gariyān yanjihvāgre vartate nāma tubhyam;
Tepustapaste juhuvuhu sasnurāryā,
Brahmānuchurnām grunanti ye te.

O God, even by remembering you or listening to your name just once, or by prostrating before you and meditating upon your divine form, even a *shvapach* is instantly inspired to perform *yagna* and earn liberation; it is no wonder, then, that a person attains salvation by your darshan.

It is indeed amazing that even when a *shvapach* chants your name he attains eminence over those who are devoid of devotion to you. Again, those people who have chanted your name are said to have performed austerities, performed *yagnas*, bathed at holy places, led a virtuous and noble life and have understood the Vedas properly.

- Shrimad Bhagvat 3-33-6, 7

Dharmastyājyo na kaishchit, svanigamavihito Vāsudevecha Bhakti,
Divyākāre vidheyā sitaghanamahasi Brahmanaikyam nijasya;
Nishchityaivānyavastu-nyanumapi cha ratim samparityajya santaha,
Tanmāhātmyāya sevyā iti vadati nijān dhārmiko Neelakanthah.

Nobody should forsake their dharma as described in the Vedas. Without harbouring even a trace of attachment to any material things, one should identify one's atma with Aksharbrahman and offer devotion to the brilliant and luminous murti of God. To offer devotion and understand the glory of Shri Hari keep the close company of sadhus," says Nilkanth, the son of Dharma, to his devotees.

- Satsangijivan 5-55-28

Drushtā sprushtā natā vā krutaparicharanā bhojitā pujitā vā,
Sadyaha punsamadyoudham bahujanajanitam
ghnanti ye vai samulam;
Proktāhā Krushnena ye vā nijahridayasamā yatpade tirthajātam,
Teshām mātaha prasangātkimiha nanu satām
durlabham syānmumukshoho.

O Mother! What is rarer for the spiritual aspirants of this world than the company

of those sadhus by whose mere darshan and touch, and by bowing to whom, service to whom, feeding of whom, worship of whom the mountains of sins of man are instantly destroyed from the roots? And also, what is rarer for the spiritual aspirants of this world than the company of those sadhus who are beheld as dearly by God as his own heart and at whose lotus-feet reside all pilgrim places? Nothing. In these words Shri Hari had explained the glory of Satsang to his own mother Bhaktidevi.

- Satsangijivan 1-32-46

Na rodhayati mām yogo, na sānkhyamdharma eva cha;
Na svādhyāyastapastyāgo neshtāpurtam na dakshinā.
Vratāni yagnashchhandāsi tirthāni niyamā yamāhā;
Yathāvarundhe satsangaha sarvasangāpaho hi mām.

Lord Krishna tells Uddhavji that he is pleased more by satsang, which destroys all evil company, than by *sankhya*, study of Vedas, austerities, renunciation, *yagnas* nor the benevolent acts of digging wells, offering alms, observing *vrats* or *pujan*, chanting mantras, visiting holy places or observing *yama* and *niyam*.

- Shrimad Bhagvat 11-12-1, 2

33. Bhaktaraj Maganbhai

The moving spirit behind the Satsang in Africa was the great devotee Maganbhai Patel. He was one of the leading devotees who spread the worship of Akshar-Purushottam in East Africa.

This great devotee was born in Vaso in the Charotar region of Gujarat, on Shravan *vad* 11, V.S. 1957 (15 August 1901 CE). After completing his studies in India, he went to East Africa and worked in the railways.

In 1929, Maganbhai was appointed as the Station Master at Kibwezi. That year a devotee named Harmanbhai from Gana (India), who also worked for the railway, was transferred to Kibwezi. Harmanbhai completely transformed Maganbhai. He gave up all addictions. He frequently heard Harmanbhai recite the Vachanamrut and became very eager to know about the satsang. Their association resulted in genuine love for each other. They had become one, like sugar dissolved in milk. Then Maganbhai was transferred to Makindu, but they continued their contact by telephone. Through Harmanbhai, Maganbhai came into contact with Swami Nirgundasji. The inspiring letters of Nirgundas Swami kindled a flame in his heart and he became a serious student of the Vachanamrut. He learnt about the glory of Shastriji Maharaj through Nirgundas Swami. All his doubts were resolved the moment he came into contact with Shastriji Maharaj.

Deep study of the scriptures, communion with Shastriji Maharaj and deep devotion gave him an insight into intricate details of Akshar-Purushottam, Atma-Paramatma, Brahman-Parabrahman, and true eternal wisdom.

It was like a miracle that after coming into contact with Shastriji Maharaj, not only did Maganbhai give up addictions, but he also inspired thousands of people to free themselves from addictions. He turned them all onto the spiritual path and made them experience divine bliss. Maganbhai thus dedicated his entire life in the service of Shriji Maharaj and Shastriji Maharaj. He found great bliss in chanting their names and singing in their praise day and night. He made others experience the same bliss which he was experiencing.

His love for Shastriji Maharaj reached the loftiest heights. Other devotees had seen and experienced this. At times, he would swoon or cry bitterly remembering Shastriji Maharaj and Sahajanand Swami. People were spellbound by his great oratory while he gave discourses on the Vachanamrut or on incidents from the lives of sadhus and devotees. His devotion was so deep, he could talk for the whole night without any sign of fatigue. During *arti* Maganbhai became completely merged in the *murti* of Maharaj, oblivious of everything including his corporeal self. He would roll in the water used by Shastriji Maharaj for bathing and would roll in the dust trod upon by the holy feet of Swami. People were greatly touched by his deep devotion and firm faith in the supremacy of Maharaj.

For nearly twenty years he celebrated innumerable festivals and gave learned discourses in Africa. He revealed the real divinity of Shastriji Maharaj and inspired thousands of people to join the Satsang, not only by preaching the satsang philosophy, but by practising it. He helped to transform the lives of many people by inspiring them to give up drinking and eating flesh. He led them onto the path of truth, spirituality and devotion and saved them from ruin and destruction.

After meeting Harmanbhai at Kibwezi in Kenya, he was transferred to Makindu, Gilgil, Kisumu, Tororo, Jinja, Namasagli and other places. Wherever he went, he convened satsang assemblies and organized the Satsang systematically. In 1934, the East Africa Satsang Mandal was founded by Maganbhai at Kijabe. He attracted many people of different faiths and different communities towards the Satsang activities.

Before retirement, he was transferred to Tororo, a place where hard drinks were used in place of water, and God or religion were ignored. Previously, Harmanbhai had tried to change the people's ways there, but had failed. Maganbhai was a bit puzzled in the beginning. However, Shastriji Maharaj once again blessed him, "Try again. The Satsang shall flourish." And truly, Tororo, which is known as the gateway of Uganda, received Satsang with open arms. The hearts of stone melted at the touch of the Swaminarayan Sampradaya and people started leading a noble life. From Tororo, the Satsang spread throughout Uganda. With firm faith in God's infinite will and the blessings of Shastriji Maharaj, Maganbhai could move mountains. *"Ātmavat sarva bhuteshu"* – to see the *atma* in all – was his motto. He was so loved by the people that they found parting from him most painful and many were moved to tears whenever he took leave.

Although, he was a householder, he led the life of a sadhu. Shastriji Maharaj used to say, "I am working through Maganbhai in Africa. You should seek communion with him." While giving discourses, Shastriji Maharaj used to make frequent references to

Maganbhai and pay tributes to his meritorious work of popularizing the Akshar-Purushottam philosophy in East Africa. Maganbhai possessed all the noble qualities of dharma, *niyam*, *nishchay*, *paksha* and courage which make a true devotee. He was able to spread the work of Shastriji Maharaj due to his blessings. Although he had become an eminent personality, he remained humble. He never used authority, even privately or secretly. He was a man with humility and inspired others to become humble servants of God.

Maganbhai passed away to Akshardham on Monday, Bhadarva *vad* 5, V.S. 2008 (8 September 1952 CE) at 3.00 a.m. at Tororo. It was a great shock for the Satsang in Africa. His departure created a great vacuum in the Sanstha. His was no longer physically present, but his spirit continued to guide the Satsang. The seeds of the Sanstha which he had sown in Africa grew into a large body of devotees. Yogiji Maharaj made three visits to East Africa. From there, the Satsang has established firm roots in England, America and many other places.

Glory to Maganbhai for his priceless contributions to the Satsang.

1. The title refers to the importance of the digit '1'. A long row of zeros has no value, but when a single '1' is placed before the zeros, the value of the composite figure is exponentially increased with each zero.

2. *Prasangam-ajaram pāsham-ātmanaha kavayo viduhu;*
Sa eva sādhushu kruto moksha-dvāram-apāvrutam.

- Shrimad Bhagvat: 3.25.20

Glossary

A

acharya establisher of a religious doctrine or a school of philosophy. The later acharyas, starting with Shankaracharya, established a school of philosophy, having written commentaries on the Vyas Sutras, the Upanishads and the Bhagvad Gita

agna instruction, order, command

ahimsak yagna vedic sacrifice in which grains are offered

akartum extraordinary divine power of God whereby He exercises restraint in his power to eclipse the infinite muktas of Akshardham by his own divine light and prevail alone

Akshar in his impersonal form, Akshar is the abode of Purushottam, called Akshardham

aksharrup 'form of Akshar'. That which has qualities similar to those of Akshar. Used to describe the spiritual state of *akshar muktas*. Highest level of faith or spiritual status is to become *aksharrup* and worship Purushottam

antahkaran aggregate of manas, buddhi, chitt and ahamkar

anushtup a poetic metre

anyatha kartum extraordinary divine power of God

aparigraha vow of non-possession

artha one of the four *purusharths*, allowing for the fulfillment of desires for material objects, in particular wealth

arti Hindu ritual of waving lighted wicks before the *murti* of God as an act of worship and reverence

asana third of the eight steps of *ashtang* yoga, entailing physical exercises of postures for soundness of body, which promotes concentration

atma soul

atmabuddhi intense affection

atmajnan knowledge of the *atma*

atyantik kalyan final liberation

avatari the supreme avatar, the highest incarnation of God

B

bawa a low order of ascetics, see also vairagi

bhagavadiya tirth a pilgrim place

bhakta devotee

brahmabhojan a meal for Thakorji

brahmachari a celibate. One who practises *brahma-charya* and whose *indriyas* are engrossed in God

brahmacharya eight–fold celibacy

brahman aksharbrahman, ideal Devotee of Bhagwan Swaminarayan

brahmand universe

brahmarup 'form of Brahman'. Possessing qualities similar to those of Brahman

brahmavetta one who knows Brahman

brahmavidya the knowledge which leads to God-realization

C

chaitanya 'consciousness'. The substance of the *atma*.

chakravak a type of bird

champa a kind of flower

chandrayan a form of fasting based on the phases of the moon

chheda vartman vow of avoiding physical contact withthe opposite gender

chidakash formless and pure *chaitanya* form of Akshar

chitra-prabandh a poetic style

chitta mind, consciousness

chopai a poetic metre

crore ten million

D

darbar court of residence belonging to a king or feudal ruler, traditionally with a central courtyard surrounded by rooms with verandas

datan thin, soft stick cut from certain trees used for cleaning teeth

deva deity

dharna concentration. Sixth of the eight steps of *ashtang* yoga, entailing focusing of the mind to guide the flow of consciousness

dhun chanting of the holy name of God, often to the accompaniment of musical instruments

dhunya Commonly pronounced ‘dhun’. See *dhun*

dhyan meditation

diksha initiation

E

ekadashi 11th day of the bright and dark halves of a lunar month

ekantik one who has realized the four factors of Ekantik Dharma

Ekantik Sant refers to the ideal Ekantik Sadhu, the Satpurush

F

feto long piece of cloth twisted and tied around the head as a headdress

G

gatariyu upper garment worn by a sadhu or parshad

guldavadi flower of the chrysanthemum genus. Also known as sevanti

gunatit transcending the *gunas*

I

ishtadev beloved God

ishwar one of the five eternal realities; a cosmic being

J

jangam tirth a moving pilgrim place, i.e., Satpurush

jiva soul

jivatma see *jiva*

jnan knowledge

K

kalyan liberation. Synonym of *moksha*, *mukti*

kanthi a double stranded necklace of miniature beads, usually of wood, worn by devotees on being initiated into the Satsang

karmayogi a householder devotee

kartum extraordinary divine power of God to eclipse the infinite *muktas* of Akshardham by his own divine light and prevail alone

khes piece of cloth worn as a dhoti

kumbhak retention of breath

kutastha steadfast

M

mahamantra great mantra

mahapuja elaborate worship rituals of Bhagwan Swaminarayan, Gunatitanand Swami, muktas, incarnations and deities

mahima glory and greatness

mahor coin

mangala arti first arti of the day, at sunrise

mansi form of worship in which one devoutly performs puja, offers *arti, thal*, etc. to God mentally – exactly as one would physically

maund 20 kg

maya one of the five eternal realities. Ignorance, darkness, material universe

moha attachment

moksha liberation. Synonym of *kalyan, mukti*

mrudang type of double-sided drum. Traditional Indian percussion instrument played to supply rhythm in the singing of devotional songs

mukhvas mouth fresheners eaten after meals

mukta liberated souls

mukti liberation

muni a renunciant

murti sacred idol of God that is revered and worshipped

N

naishthik eightfold

narak hell

niransha indivisible

nirgun 'with gunas'. Possessing divine qualities and redemptive virtues

nirlobh vow of non-covetousness

nirman vow of humility

nirvikalp adjective describing faith or state of being in which one sees only God

nirvikari unchanging

nishchay absolute faith

nishkam vow of absolute celibacy

nissneh vow of detachment

nisswad vow of non-taste

nitya tirth eternal pilgrim place

niyam moral and spiritual disciplines, and religious codes of conduct prescribed by God, the Satpurush, or the scriptures

P

pagh traditional Indian headgear

paksha support for a person or principle

panch vartman five vows

panchvishay the five types of objects in which the *jiva* indulges via the *indriyas* (senses)

paraj a poetic metre

paramhansas 'supreme swan'. A male sadhu of the highest order, characterised by his ability to discriminate between sat and asat – just as swans were traditionally considered to be able to distinguish between milk mixed with water

parshad renunciant wearing white robes

parshsad diksha initiation into the *parshad*-order

prakar chapter of a shastra

prakaran chapter of a shastra

prana lifeforce

pranayam yogic breathing exercise

prasad sanctified food, blessed and consecrated by having been offered to God

pratyahar 'withdrawal'. Fifth of the eight steps of ashtang-yoga, entailing withdrawing of consciousness from oneself to engage in a higher consciousness

pujan worship

purak inhalation

puri small, flat and round fried pieces of wheat dough. Usually eaten with curried vegetables

R

rechak exhalation

reto tied around the head or waist, or left to rest upon the shoulders

rotlo a basic unleavened bread-like staple food of many parts of Gujarat, made generally of millet flour that is kneaded and patted into a flat, circular shape before being cooked on an earthen or metal hot plate

S

sagun 'with gunas'. Possessing mayik qualities, i.e., not divine

sampradaya a religious movement, a tradition handed down from a founder through succesive spiritual gurus

sankhya thoughts that make us realize the perishable nature of everything except God, his abode and the liberated souls

sankhyayogi a renunciant

sanskar values

sant sadhu

Sant Tirth the God-realized Sadhu revered as a pilgrim place

saparshad dhyan meditation on God with his choicest devotee

Satpurush God's holy Sadhu; the manifest form of God

satsang *sat* = truth or good, *sang* = company or group. Satsang refers to keeping the company of pious and virtuous people. Satsang is also used to describe the entire Swaminarayan Sampradaya

satsangi a member of the Satsang felllowship. One who practices satsang

shangar adornment

sharir embodiment. Generally, that which is pervaded, inspired and governed by the *atma*

shariri that which pervades, inspires and governs the sharir

shiro a sweet delicacy

shlok verse in Sanskrit

shvapach a person who earns a living by handling the remains of dead animals

skand section of a shastra

smruti to recall, to remember a divine episode of God or Satpurush

sud the bright half of a month. So, Kartik *sud* means 'the bright half of the month of Kartik.'

sudarshan chakra a small disc-like revolving weapon used by Lord Krishna

swadharma one's own dharma

swarg heaven

swastik a yogic posture

T

tal rhythm

thal food offered to Bhagwan

tirth sacred place

U

upasana worship of Parmatma, with special emphasis on his greatness, grandeur and glory

upjati a poetic metre

V

vad the dark half of a month. So Kartik *vad* means 'the dark half of the month of Kartik'

vadi type of snake charmer

vairagi bawa mendicant

vairagya 'detachment'. An aversion or strong, persistent dislike, generally for the world and its material pleasures

vartman ritual of initiation

vishay worldly pleasure

vrat vow, observance

vrutti emanations of the physical senses and mind

Y

yagna a ritual sacrifice performed with the purpose of achieving a particular desire

yama first step of *ashtang* yoga